I

INTRODUCTION: INDIA AND HER ANCIENT CULTURE

THE LAND OF INDIA

THE ancient civilization of India grew up in a sharply demarcated sub-continent bounded on the north by the world's largest mountain range—the chain of the Himālayas, which, with its extensions to east and west, divides India from the rest of Asia and the world. The barrier, however, was at no time an insuperable one, and at all periods both settlers and traders have found their way over the high and desolate passes into India, while Indians have carried their commerce and culture beyond her frontiers by the same route. India's isolation has never been complete, and the effect of the mountain wall in developing her unique civilization has often been over-rated.

The importance of the mountains to India is not so much in the isolation which they give her, as in the fact that they are the source of her two great rivers. The clouds drifting northwards and westwards in the rainy season discharge the last of their moisture on the high peaks, whence, fed by ever-melting snow, innumerable streams flow southwards, to meet in the great river systems of the Indus and the Gangā. On their way they pass through small and fertile plateaux, such as the valleys of Kashmīr and Nepāl, to debouch on the great plain.

Of the two river systems, that of the Indus, now mainly in Pākistān, had the earliest civilization, and gave its name to India.* More than two thousand years before Christ the fertile plain of the Panjāb ("Five Rivers"), watered by the five great tributaries of the Indus—the Jhelam, Chenāb, Rāvī, Beās and Satlaj—had a high culture, which spread as far as the sea and along the western seaboard at least as far as Gujarāt. The lower Indus, in the region of Pākistān known

* The Indians knew this river as *Sindhu*, and the Persians, who found difficulty in pronouncing an initial *s*, called it *Hindu*. From Persia the word passed to Greece, where the whole of India became known by the name of the western river. The ancient Indians knew their sub-continent as *Jambudvīpa* (the continent of the *jambu* tree) or *Bhāratavarṣa* (the Land of the sons of Bharata, a legendary emperor) (p. 490f). The latter name has been in part revived by the present Indian government. With the Muslim invasion the Persian name returned in the form *Hindustān*, and those of its inhabitants who followed the old religion became known as *Hindus*. The form *Hindusthān*, popular in modern India, is an Indo-Iranian hybrid with no linguistic justification.

as Sind, now passes through barren desert, though this was once a well watered and fertile land.

The basin of the Indus is divided from that of the Gangā by the Thar, or desert of Rājasthān, and by low hills. The watershed, to the north-west of Delhī, has been the scene of many bitter battles since at least 1000 B.C. The western half of the Gangā plain, from the region around Delhī to Patnā, and including the *Doāb*, or the land between the Gangā and its great tributary river Yamunā (formerly spelt Jumna, Jamna), has always been the heart of India. Here, in the region once known as *Āryāvarta*, the land of the Āryans, her classical culture was formed. Though generations of unscientific farming, deforestation, and other factors have now much reduced its fertility, this was once among the most productive lands in the world, and it has supported a very large population ever since it was brought under the plough. At its mouth in Bengal the Gangā forms a large delta, which even in historical times has gained appreciably on the sea; here the Gangā joins the Brahmaputra, which flows from Tibet by way of the Valley of Assam, the easternmost outpost of Hindu culture.

South of the great plain is a highland zone, rising to the chain of the Vindhya mountains. These are by no means as impressive as the Himālayas, but have tended to form a barrier between the North, formerly called Hindustān, and the Peninsula, often known as the Deccan (meaning simply "South"), a term used sometimes for the whole peninsula, but more often for its northern and central portions. Most of the Deccan is a dry and hilly plateau, bordered on either side by long ranges of hills, the Western and Eastern Ghāts. Of these two ranges the western is the higher, and therefore most of the rivers of the Deccan, such as the Mahānadī, the Godāvarī, the Kistnā or Kṛṣṇā, and the Kāvirī, flow eastwards to the sea. Two large rivers only, the Narmadā and the Tāptī, flow westwards. Near their mouths the Deccan rivers pass through plains which are smaller than that of the Gangā but almost as populous. The south-eastern part of the Peninsula forms a larger plain, the Tamil country, the culture of which was once independent, and is not yet completely unified with that of the North. The Dravidian peoples of Southern India still speak languages in no way akin to those of the North, and are of a different ethnic character (p. 24f), though there has been much intermixture between Northern and Southern types. Geographically Ceylon is a continuation of India, the plain of the North resembling that of South India, and the mountains in the centre of the island the Western Ghāts.

From Kashmīr in the North to Cape Comorin in the South the sub-continent is about 2,000 miles long, and therefore its climate

varies considerably. The Himālayan region has cold winters, with occasional frost and snow. In the northern plains the winter is cool, with wide variation of day and night temperature, whereas the hot season is almost intolerable. The temperature of the Deccan varies less with the season, though in the higher parts of the plateau nights are cool in winter. The Tamil Plain is continuously hot, but its temperature never rises to that of the northern plains in summer.

The most important feature of the Indian climate is the monsoon, or "the Rains". Except along the west coast and in parts of Ceylon little rain falls from October to May, when cultivation can only be carried on by carefully husbanding the water of rivers and streams, and raising a winter crop by irrigation. By the end of April growth has practically ceased. The temperature of the plains rises as high as 110° F. (43° C.) or over, and an intensely hot wind blows. Trees shed their leaves, grass is almost completely parched, wild animals often die in large numbers for want of water. Work is reduced to a minimum, and the world seems asleep.

Then clouds appear, high in the sky; in a few days they grow more numerous and darker, rolling up in banks from the sea. At last, in June, the rains come in great downpouring torrents, with much thunder and lightning. The temperature quickly drops, and within a few days the world is green and smiling again. Beasts, birds and insects reappear, the trees put on new leaves, and the earth is covered with fresh grass. The torrential rains, which fall at intervals for a couple of months and then gradually die away, make travel and all outdoor activity difficult, and often bring epidemics in their wake; but, despite these hardships, to the Indian mind the coming of the monsoon corresponds to the coming of spring in Europe. For this reason thunder and lightning, in Europe generally looked on as inauspicious, have no terrors for the Indian, but are welcome signs of the goodness of heaven (p. 257).

It has often been said that the scale of natural phenomena in India, and her total dependence on the monsoon, have helped to form the character of her peoples. Even today major disasters, such as flood, famine and plague, are hard to check, and in older times their control was almost impossible. Many other ancient civilizations, such as those of the Greeks, Romans and Chinese, had to contend with hard winters, which encouraged sturdiness and resource. India, on the other hand, was blessed by a bounteous Nature, who demanded little of man in return for sustenance, but in her terrible anger could not be appeased by any human effort. Hence, it has been suggested, the Indian character has tended to fatalism and quietism, accepting fortune and misfortune alike without complaint.

How far this judgement is a fair one is very dubious. Though an element of quietism certainly existed in the ancient Indian attitude to life, as it does in India today, it was never approved by moralists. The great achievements of ancient India and Ceylon—their immense irrigation works and splendid temples, and the long campaigns of their armies—do not suggest a devitalized people. If the climate had any effect on the Indian character it was, we believe, to develop a love of ease and comfort, an addiction to the simple pleasures and luxuries so freely given by Nature—a tendency to which the impulse to self-denial and asceticism on the one hand, and occasional strenuous effort on the other, were natural reactions.

THE DISCOVERY OF ANCIENT INDIA

The ancient civilization of India differs from those of Egypt, Mesopotamia and Greece, in that its traditions have been preserved without a break down to the present day. Until the advent of the archæologist, the peasant of Egypt or Iraq had no knowledge of the culture of his forefathers, and it is doubtful whether his Greek counterpart had any but the vaguest ideas about the glory of Periclean Athens. In each case there had been an almost complete break with the past. On the other hand, the earliest Europeans to visit India found a culture fully conscious of its own antiquity—a culture which indeed exaggerated that antiquity, and claimed not to have fundamentally changed for many thousands of years. To this day legends known to the humblest Indian recall the names of shadowy chieftains who lived nearly a thousand years before Christ, and the orthodox brāhmaṇ in his daily worship repeats hymns composed even earlier. India and China have, in fact, the oldest continuous cultural traditions in the world.

Until the last half of the 18th century Europeans made no real attempt to study India's ancient past, and her early history was known only from brief passages in the works of Greek and Latin authors. A few devoted missionaries in the Peninsula gained a deep understanding of contemporary Indian life, and a brilliant mastery of the vernaculars, but they made no real attempt to understand the historical background of the culture of the people among whom they worked. They accepted that culture at its face value, as very ancient and unchanging, and their only studies of India's past were in the nature of speculations linking the Indians with the descendants of Noah and the vanished empires of the Bible.

Meanwhile a few Jesuits succeeded in mastering Sanskrit, the classical language of India. One of them, Father Hanxleden, who worked in Kerala from 1699 to 1732, compiled the first Sanskrit

grammar in a European tongue, which remained in manuscript, but was used by his successors. Another, Father Coeurdoux, in 1767, was probably the first student to recognize the kinship of Sanskrit and the languages of Europe, and suggested that the brāhmaṇs of India were descended from one of the sons of Japhet, whose brothers migrated to the West. Yet the Jesuits, for all their studies, gained no real understanding of India's past: the foundations of Indology were laid independently, in another part of India, and by other hands.

In the year 1783 one of the most brilliant men of the 18th century, Sir William Jones (1746–94), came to Calcutta as a judge of the Supreme Court, under the governor-generalship of Warren Hastings, who himself had deep sympathy with both Muslim and Hindu culture. Jones was a linguistic genius, who had already learnt all the more important languages of Europe as well as Hebrew, Arabic, Persian and Turkish, and had even obtained a smattering of Chinese with the aid of the very inadequate material which was available at the time. Before coming to India he had recognized the relationship of European languages to Persian, and had rejected the orthodox view of the 18th century, that all these tongues were derived from Hebrew, which had been garbled at the Tower of Babel. In place of this dogma Jones suggested that Persian and the European languages were derived from a common ancestor which was not Hebrew.

Of the little band of Englishmen who administered Bengal for the Honourable East India Company only one, Charles Wilkins (1749–1836), had managed to learn Sanskrit. With the aid of Wilkins and friendly Bengālī paṇḍits Jones began to learn the language. On the first day of 1784 the Asiatic Society of Bengal was founded, on Jones' initiative, and with Jones himself as president. In the journal of this society, *Asiatic Researches*, the first real steps in revealing India's past were taken. In November 1784 the first direct translation of a Sanskrit work into English, Wilkins's *Bhagavad Gītā*, was completed. This Wilkins followed in 1787 with a translation of the *Hitopadeśa*. In 1789 Jones translated Kālidāsa's *Śakuntalā*, which went into five English editions in less than twenty years; this he followed by translations of the *Gīta Govinda* (1792), and the law-book of Manu (published posthumously in 1794 under the title *Institutes of Hindoo Law*). Several less important translations appeared in successive issues of *Asiatic Researches*.

Jones and Wilkins were truly the fathers of Indology. They were followed in Calcutta by Henry Colebrooke (1765–1837) and Horace Hayman Wilson (1789–1860). To the works of these pioneers must be added that of the Frenchman Anquetil-Duperron, a Persian scholar who, in 1786, published a translation of four Upaniṣads from

a 17th-century Persian version—the translation of the whole manuscript, containing 50 Upaniṣads, appearing in 1801.

Interest in Sanskrit literature began to grow in Europe as a result of these translations. In 1795 the government of the French Republic founded the École des Langues Orientales Vivantes, and in Paris Alexander Hamilton (1762–1824), one of the earliest members of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, held prisoner on parole in France at the end of the Peace of Amiens in 1803, became the first person to teach Sanskrit in Europe. It was from Hamilton that Friedrich Schlegel, the first German Sanskritist, learnt the language. The first university chair of Sanskrit was founded at the Collège de France in 1814, and held by Léonard de Chézy, while from 1818 onwards the larger German universities set up professorships. Sanskrit was first taught in England in 1805 at the training college of the East India Company at Hertford. The earliest English chair was the Boden Professorship at Oxford, first filled in 1832, when it was conferred upon H. H. Wilson, who had been an important member of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. Chairs were afterwards founded at London, Cambridge and Edinburgh, and at several other universities of Europe and America.

In 1816, Franz Bopp (1791–1867), a Bavarian, on the basis of the hints of Sir William Jones, succeeded in very tentatively reconstructing the common ancestor of Sanskrit and the classical languages of Europe, and comparative philology became an independent science. In 1821, the French Société Asiatique was founded in Paris, followed two years later by the Royal Asiatic Society in London. From these beginnings the work of the editing and study of ancient Indian literature went on apace throughout the 19th century. Probably the greatest achievement of Indological scholarship in 19th-century Europe was the enormous Sanskrit-German dictionary generally known as the St. Petersburg Lexicon, produced by the German scholars Otto Böhtlingk and Rudolf Roth, and published in parts by the Russian Imperial Academy of Sciences from 1852 to 1875. England's greatest contributions to Sanskrit studies were the splendid edition of the *Ṛg Veda*, and the great series of authoritative annotated translations, *Sacred Books of the East*. Both these works were edited by the great German Sanskritist Friedrich Max. Müller (1823–1900), who spent most of his working life as Professor of Comparative Philology at Oxford.

Meanwhile the study of ancient Indian culture was proceeding in another direction. The first work of the Asiatic Society of Bengal had been almost entirely literary and linguistic, and most of the 19th-century Indologists were primarily scholars in the classical tradition, working on written records. Early in the 19th century, however,

the Bengal Society began to turn some of its attention to the material remains of India's past, as the East India Company's surveyors brought back to Calcutta many reports of temples, caves and shrines, together with early coins and copies of inscriptions in long-dead scripts. By working backwards from the current scripts the older ones were gradually deciphered, until in 1837 a gifted amateur, James Prinsep, an official of the Calcutta Mint and Secretary of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, interpreted for the first time the earliest Brāhmī script and was able to read the edicts of the great emperor Aśoka. Among Prinsep's colleagues in the work of decipherment was a young officer of the Royal Engineers, Alexander Cunningham the father of Indian archæology. From his arrival in India in 1831 Cunningham devoted every minute he could spare from his military duties to the study of the material remains of ancient India, until, in 1862, the Indian government established the post of Archæological Surveyor, to which he was appointed. Until his retirement in 1885 he devoted himself to the unravelling of India's past with complete single-heartedness. Though he made no startling discoveries, and though his technique was, by modern archæological standards, crude and primitive, there is no doubt that, after Sir William Jones, Indology owes more to General Sir Alexander Cunningham than to any other worker in the field. Cunningham was assisted by several other pioneers, and though at the end of the 19th century the activities of the Archæological Survey almost ceased, owing to niggardly government grants, by 1900 many ancient buildings had been surveyed, and many inscriptions read and translated.

It was only in the 20th century that archæological excavation on a large scale began in India. Thanks to the personal interest of the Viceroy, Lord Curzon, in 1901 the Archæological Survey was reformed and enlarged, and a young archæologist, John (later Sir John) Marshall, appointed as Director General. For a country of the size of India the Archæological Department was still lamentably small and poor, but Marshall was able to employ a number of expert assistants, and had funds for excavation on a scale more extensive than anything previously attempted. For the first time traces of the ancient cities of India began to come to light—archæology, as distinct from the surveying and conservation of ancient monuments, had begun in real earnest. The greatest triumph of the Archæological Survey of India under Sir John Marshall's directorship was undoubtedly the discovery of the Indus civilization. The first relics of India's oldest cities were noticed by Cunningham, who found strange unidentified seals in the neighbourhood of

Harappā in the Panjāb. In 1922 an Indian officer of the Archæological Survey, R. D. Banerjī, found further seals at Mohenjo Daro in Sind, and recognized that they were the remains of a pre-Āryan civilization of great antiquity. Under Sir John Marshall's direction the sites were systematically excavated from 1924 until his retirement in 1931. Digging was interrupted by financial retrenchment, and by the Second World War; but further important discoveries were made at Harappā during the brief directorship of Sir R. E. Mortimer Wheeler just after the war, though the sites are still by no means fully cleared.

Much has yet to be done. Many mounds as yet unexcavated may throw floods of light on the dark places of India's past: unpublished manuscripts of great importance may yet lie mouldering in out-of-the-way libraries. India, Pākistān and Ceylon are poor countries, desperately in need of funds with which to raise the standard of living of their peoples; but with the resources available the archæological departments of all three countries are working to their fullest capacity to reveal the past.

Even in the last century, much valuable work was done by natives of India, especially by such Sanskritists and epigraphists as Drs. Bhāū Dājī, Bhagavānlāl Indrājī, Rājendralāl Mitra, and the great Sir R. G. Bhāndārkar. Now the chief initiative in Indology comes from the Indians themselves. Indian scholars have already completed the first critical edition of the gigantic *Mahābhārata*, and have started work on the enormous Poona Sanskrit Dictionary, which, when complete, will probably be the greatest work of lexicography the world has ever seen. Since 1947 the Archæological Department has been entirely under Indian direction, and today the Western Indologist cannot hope to be more than the helper and friendly critic of the Asian. In times like these, however, when Asia is reacting against a century and a half of European domination, and a new culture, which will contain elements of East and West in firm synthesis, is in the process of birth, the European student still has a useful role to play in Indology.

THE GLORY OF ANCIENT INDIA

At most periods of her history India, though a cultural unit, has been torn by internecine war. In statecraft her rulers were cunning and unscrupulous. Famine, flood and plague visited her from time to time, and killed millions of her people. Inequality of birth was given religious sanction, and the lot of the humble was generally hard. Yet our overall impression is that in no other part of the ancient world were the relations of man and man, and of man and the

state, so fair and humane. In no other early civilization were slaves so few in number, and in no other ancient lawbook are their rights so well protected as in the *Arthaśāstra* (p. 154f). No other ancient lawgiver proclaimed such noble ideals of fair play in battle as did Manu (p. 127). In all her history of warfare Hindu India has few tales to tell of cities put to the sword or of the massacre of non-combatants. The ghastly sadism of the kings of Assyria, who flayed their captives alive, is completely without parallel in ancient India. There was sporadic cruelty and oppression no doubt, but, in comparison with conditions in other early cultures, it was mild. To us the most striking feature of ancient Indian civilization is its humanity.

Some 19th-century missionaries, armed with passages from Hindu and Buddhist scriptures, often taken out of their context, and with tales of famine, disease, and the evils of the Hindu caste and family system, have helped to propagate the widespread fallacy that India is a land of lethargic gloom. The traveller landing at Bombay has only to watch the rush-hour crowds, and to compare them mentally with those of London, to realize that the Indian character is neither lethargic nor unhappy. This conclusion is borne out by a general acquaintance with the remains of India's past. Our second general impression of ancient India is that her people enjoyed life, passionately delighting both in the things of the senses and the things of the spirit.

The European student who concentrates on religious texts of a certain type may well gain the impression that ancient India was a land of "life-negating" * ascetics, imposing their gloomy and sterile ideas upon the trusting millions who were their lay followers. The fallacy of this impression is quite evident from the secular literature, sculpture and painting of the time. The average Indian, though he might pay lip-service to the ascetic and respect his ideals, did not find life a vale of tears from which to escape at all costs; rather he was willing to accept the world as he found it, and to extract what happiness he could from it. Daṇḍin's description of the joys of a simple meal served in a comparatively poor home (p. 446ff) is probably more typical of ancient Indian everyday life than are the Upaniṣads. India was a cheerful land, whose people, each finding a niche in a complex and slowly evolving social system, reached a higher level of kindliness and gentleness in their mutual relationships than any other nation of antiquity. For this, as well as for her great achievements in religion, literature, art and mathematics, one European student at least would record his admiration of India's ancient culture.

* This term, as applied to Indian religion, thought and culture, is that of the great Dr. Albert Schweitzer (*Indian Thought and its Development*, passim).

II

PREHISTORY: THE HARAPPĀ CULTURE AND THE ĀRYANS

PRIMITIVE MAN IN INDIA

LIKE prehistoric Europe, Northern India experienced ice ages, and it was after the second of these, in the Second Interglacial Period, more than 100,000 years before Christ, that man first left surviving traces in India. These are the palæolithic pebble tools of the Soan Culture, so called from the little river in the Panjāb where they have been found in large numbers. In type they resemble tools widely distributed all over the Old World, from England to Africa and China. In India no human remains have been found in association with the tools, but elsewhere such industries have been shown to be the work of primitive anthropoid types, such as the *Pithecanthropus* of Java and China.

In the South there existed another prehistoric stone industry, which is not conclusively dated, but which may have been the approximate contemporary of that of the Soan Valley. The men of this culture made core tools, especially fine hand axes, formed by striking off flakes from a large pebble, and they evidently had much better command over their material than the Soan men. This Madras Industry, as it is called by the archæologists, has affinities with similar core tool industries in Africa, western Europe, and southern England, where it has been found in association with a more advanced type of man—a true *Homo sapiens*.

The Gangā Valley is one of the newest parts of the earth's surface, and geologists believe that much of it was still a shallow sea at the time of these two stone-age industries; but there may have been contact between them by way of Rājasthān, for the tools of one culture have been found sporadically in the region of the other. The men who used these palæoliths must have lived in India for many millennia. Who they were and what became of them we do not know. Their blood may still flow in the inhabitants of modern India, but if the pebble industry of Soan was the work of proto-human anthropoids they must have vanished long ago, like the Neanderthal men in Europe and the Pithecanthropi of the Far East. *Homo sapiens* continued in India, his skill and technical equipment imperceptibly improving down the ages. He learnt to fashion microliths,

tiny and delicate stone scrapers and other implements, which have been found in many parts of India, from the N.-W. Frontier to the extreme south. Similar microlithic industries occur in many parts of the Near East and Africa, but their chronological relationship with the microlithic industry of India is not clear. In parts of the Deccan microliths are often found together with polished stone axes, and it would seem that in the remoter parts of the Peninsula their use was only fully replaced by that of iron tools around the beginning of the Christian age.[1]

THE FIRST VILLAGES

Palæolithic man was a hunter and food gatherer, and lived in very small communities, which were usually nomadic. In the course of time he learnt to kindle fire, to protect his body from the weather with skin, bark or leaves, and to tame the wild dog which lurked round his campfire. In India, as all over the world, people lived thus for many thousands of years.

Then, very recently in the perspective of geological time, great changes took place in man's way of living. Certainly not much earlier than 10,000 B.C., and perhaps as late as 6000 B.C., man developed what Professor Gordon Childe calls "an aggressive attitude to his environment". He learnt how to grow food crops, to tame domestic animals, to make pots, and to weave garments. Before discovering the use of metal, he taught himself to make well-polished stone implements far in advance of those of the palæolithic age. Such implements have been found all over India, but mostly in the North-West and in the Deccan, and usually on or near the surface. In much of the country neolithic culture survived long, and many of the wilder hill tribes of the present day have only recently emerged from this stage.

Developed agriculture and permanent villages probably began in the 7th millennium B.C., in the Middle East. In India the earliest remains of settled cultures are of little agricultural villages in Balūchistān and lower Sind, perhaps dating from the end of the 4th millennium.

Classical writers show that when, in 326 B.C., Alexander of Macedon crossed the Indus, the climate of N.-W. India was much as it is today, though perhaps a little moister. The river valleys were fertile and well wooded, though the coastal strip to the west of the Indus, now called the Makrān, and much of Balūchistān, were already dry and desolate. But in 3000 B.C. the climate was rather different. The whole Indus region was well forested, providing fuel to burn

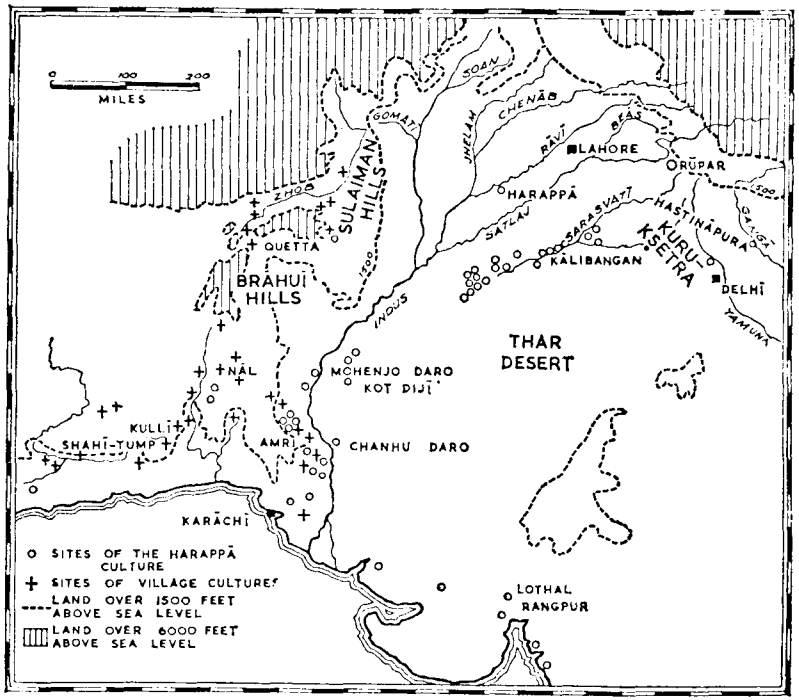


Fig. i.—Some Prehistoric Sites of N.-W. India

bricks and food for the wild elephant and rhinoceros, and Balūchistān, now almost a waterless desert, was rich in rivers. This region supported many villages of agriculturists, who had settled in the upland valleys of Balūchistān and in the then fertile plain of the Makrān and the lower Indus.

These people belonged to several cultures, primarily distinguished by different types of painted pottery. Each culture had distinctive features of its own, but all were of the same generic pattern as those of the Middle East. Though their settlements were small, rarely more than a few acres in extent, their material standards were comparatively high. The villagers dwelt in comfortable houses of mud brick with lower courses of stone, and made good pottery, which they painted with pleasant patterns. They knew the use of metal, for a few copper implements have been discovered in the sites.

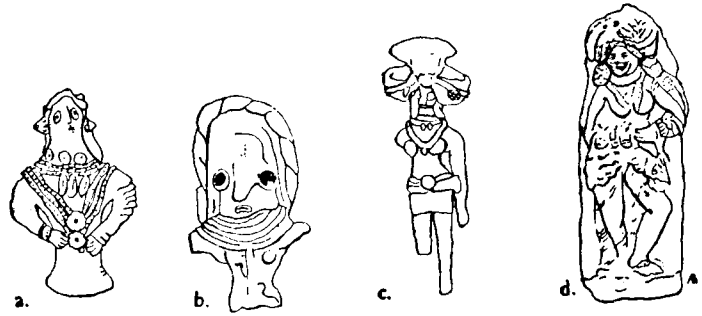


Fig. ii.—Terracotta Figurines of Goddesses. a. Kullī, c. 2500–2000 B.C. b. Zhob, c. 2500–2000 B.C. c. Harappā, c. 2000 B.C. d. Kauśāmbī, c. 100 B.C.

The village cultures had varying customs, for the secluded valleys of the Brāhūī Hills and the comparative simplicity of the lives of inhabitants did not encourage very close contact. Thus the northern villages made predominantly red pottery, and the southern buff; the people of the Kullī Culture, in the Makrān, burnt their dead, while those of the Nāl Culture, in the Brāhuī Hills, practised fractional burial, or the inhumation of the bones after partial disintegration by burning or exposure.

Their religion was of the type practised by other early agricultural communities in the Mediterranean region and the Middle East, centring round fertility rites and the worship of a Mother Goddess. Figurines of the Goddess have been found in many sites, and in those of the Zhob Culture, to the north of Quetta, phallic emblems have also been found. In many ancient cultures the worship of the Mother

Goddess was associated with that of the bull, and these were no exception. Bull figurines have been discovered, and the bull forms a favourite motif for the decoration of the pottery of Kullī and Rānā Ghundāī, one of the most important of the Zhob sites.

The people of the Kullī culture excelled in making small boxes of soft stone, delicately engraved with linear patterns. Such boxes have been occasionally found in early Mesopotamian sites, and we may assume that they were exported by the Kullī people, perhaps filled with unguent or perfume of some kind. At Susa and elsewhere have been found a few pieces of painted pottery which are evidently imitated from the wares of the Kullī people, who obviously traded with the Middle East. Otherwise there is little evidence of contact. No certainly identifiable Mesopotamian remains have been found in Balūchistān, and there is no trace of objects from the Kullī Culture along the overland route. It seems that the Kullī people made contact with the earliest Mesopotamian civilizations by sea.

THE HARAPPĀ CITY CULTURE

In the early part of the 3rd millennium, civilization, in the sense of an organized system of government over a comparatively large area, developed nearly simultaneously in the river valleys of the Nile, Euphrates, and Indus. We know a great deal about the civilizations of Egypt and Mesopotamia, for they have left us written material which has been satisfactorily deciphered. The Indus people, on the other hand, did not engrave long inscriptions on stone or place papyrus scrolls in the tombs of their dead; all that we know of their writing is derived from the brief inscriptions of their seals, and there is no Indian counterpart of the Rosetta Stone. Several brilliant efforts have been made to read the Indus seals, but none so far has succeeded. Hence our knowledge of the Indus civilization is inadequate in many respects, and it must be classed as prehistoric, for it has no history in the strict sense of the term.

The civilization of the Indus is known to the archæologist as the Harappā Culture, from the modern name of the site of one of its two great cities, on the left bank of the Rāvī, in the Panjāb. Mohenjo Daro, the second city, is on the right bank of the Indus, some 250 miles from its mouth. Recently, excavations have been carried out on the site of Kālībangan, in the valley of the old River Sarasvatī, now almost dried up, near the border of India and West Pākistān. These have revealed a third city, almost as large as the two earlier known, and designed on the same plan. As well as these cities a few smaller towns are known, and a large number of village sites, from

Rūpar on the upper Satlaj to Lothal in Gujarāt. The area covered by the Harappā Culture therefore extended for some 950 miles from north to south, and the pattern of its civilization was so uniform that even the bricks were usually of the same size and shape from one end of it to the other. Outside this area the village cultures of Balūchistān seem to have continued much as before.

This great civilization owed little to the Middle East, and there is no reason to believe that it was formed by recent immigrants; the cities were built by people who had probably been in the Indus Valley for several centuries. The Harappā people were already Indians when they planned their cities, which hardly altered for about a thousand years. We cannot fix a precise date for the beginning of this civilization, but certain indications synchronize it roughly with the village cultures of Balūchistān. The site of Rānā Ghundāī produced a stratification which showed, in the third phase of the village's history, a type of pottery with bold designs in black on a red background. From evidence discovered by Sir R. Mortimer Wheeler in 1946 it seems that the city of Harappā was built on a site occupied by people using similar pottery. There is no evidence of the date of the foundation of the other great city of Mohenjo Daro, for its lowest strata are now below the level of the Indus, whose bed has slowly risen with the centuries; though diggings have reached 30 feet below the surface, flooding has prevented the excavation of the earliest levels of the city. Important fresh light on the origins of the Harappā culture has recently been thrown by the excavations at Kot Dijī, opposite Mohenjo Daro a few miles from the left bank of the Indus. Here, below the level of the Harappa Culture, have been found remains of an earlier culture, with pottery and tools of cruder workmanship. This Kot Dijī culture seems to have been the prototype of the developed city civilization which grew out of it.

Thus the Harappā Culture, at least in the Panjāb, was later in its beginnings than the village cultures, but it was certainly in part contemporary with them, for traces of mutual contact have been found; and some of the village cultures survived the great civilization to the east of them. From the faint indications which are all the evidence we have, it would seem that the Indus cities began in the first half, perhaps towards the middle, of the 3rd millennium B.C.; it is almost certain that they continued well into the 2nd millennium.

When these cities were first excavated no fortifications and few weapons were found, and no building could be certainly identified as a temple or a palace. The hypothesis was then put forward that the cities were oligarchic commercial republics, without sharp

extremes of wealth and poverty, and with only a weak repressive organization; but the excavations at Harappā in 1946 and further discoveries at Mohenjo Daro have shown that this idyllic picture is incorrect. Each city had a well-fortified citadel, which seems to have been used for both religious and governmental purposes. The regular planning of the streets, and the strict uniformity throughout the area of the Harappā culture in such features as weights and measures, the size of bricks, and even the layout of the great cities, suggest rather a single centralized state than a number of free communities.

Probably the most striking feature of the culture was its intense conservatism. At Mohenjo Daro nine strata of buildings have been revealed. As the level of the earth rose from the periodic flooding of the Indus new houses would be built almost exactly on the sites of the old, with only minor variations in ground plan; for nearly a millennium at least, the street plan of the cities remained the same. The script of the Indus people was totally unchanged throughout their history. There is no doubt that they had contact with Mesopotamia, but they showed no inclination to adopt the technical advances of the more progressive culture. We must assume that there was continuity of government throughout the life of the civilization. This unparalleled continuity suggests, in the words of Professor Piggott, "the unchanging traditions of the temple" rather than "the secular instability of the court".[2] It seems in fact that the civilization of Harappā, like those of Egypt and Mesopotamia, was theocratic in character.

The two cities were built on a similar plan. To the west of each was a "citadel", an oblong artificial platform some 30–50 feet high and about 400 × 200 yards in area (pl. I). This was defended by crenelated walls, and on it were erected the public buildings. Below it was the town proper, in each case at least a square mile in area. The main streets, some as much as 30 feet wide, were quite straight (pl. II*a*), and divided the city into large blocks, within which were networks of narrow unplanned lanes. In neither of the great cities has any stone building been found; standardized burnt brick of good quality was the usual building material for dwelling houses and public buildings alike. The houses, often of two or more stories, though they varied in size, were all based on much the same plan—a square courtyard, round which were a number of rooms. The entrances were usually in side alleys, and no windows faced on the streets, which must have presented a monotonous vista of dull brick walls. The houses had bathrooms, the design of which shows that the Harappan, like the modern Indian, preferred to take

bath by pouring pitchers of water over his head and shoulders. The bathrooms were provided with drains, which flowed into sewers under the main streets, leading to soak-pits. The sewers were covered throughout their length by large brick slabs. The unique sewerage system of the Indus people must have been maintained by some municipal organization, and is one of the most impressive of their achievements. No other ancient civilization until that of the Romans had so efficient a system of drains.

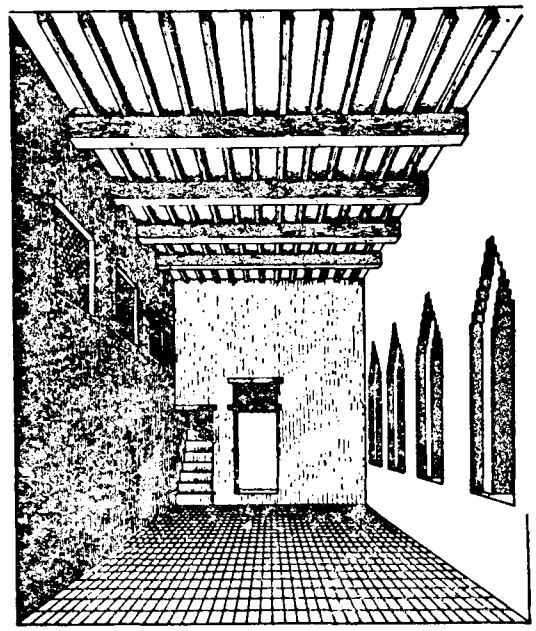


Fig. iii.—Interior of a House of the Harappā Culture
(By permission Dept. of Archæology Government of India, and Arthur Probsthain, London.)

The average size of the ground floor of a house was about 30 feet square, but there were many bigger ones: obviously there were numerous well-to-do families in the Indus cities, which perhaps had a middle class larger and more important in the social scale than those of the contemporary civilizations of Sumer and Egypt. Remains of workmen's dwellings have also been discovered at both sites—parallel rows of two-roomed cottages, at Mohenjo Daro with a superficial area of 20 × 12 feet each, but at Harappā considerably larger; they

bear a striking resemblance to the "coolie lines" of modern Indian tea and other estates. At Harappā rows of such buildings have been found near the circular brick floors on which grain was pounded, and they were probably the dwellings of the workmen whose task was to grind corn for the priests and dignitaries who lived in the citadel. Drab and tiny as they were, these cottages were better dwellings than those in which many Indian coolies live at the present day.

The most striking of the few large buildings is the great bath in the citadel area of Mohenjo Daro. This is an oblong bathing pool 39 × 23 feet in area and 8 feet deep, constructed of beautiful brickwork made watertight with bitumen (pl. II*b*). It could be drained by an opening in one corner and was surrounded by a cloister, on to which opened a number of small rooms. Like the "tank" of a Hindu temple, it probably had a religious purpose, and the cells may have been the homes of priests. The special attention paid by the people of the Harappā culture to cleanliness is hardly due to the fact that they had notions of hygiene in advance of those of other civilizations of their time, but indicates that, like the later Hindus, they had a strong belief in the purificatory effects of water from a ritual point of view.

The largest building so far excavated is one at Mohenjo Daro with a superficial area of 230 × 78 feet, which may have been a palace. At Harappā a great granary has been discovered to the north of the citadel; this was raised on a platform of some 150 × 200 feet in area to protect it from floods, and was divided into storage blocks of 50 × 20 feet each. It was doubtless used for storing the corn which was collected from the peasants as land tax, and we may assume that it had its counterpart at Mohenjo Daro. The main food crops were wheat, barley, peas, and sesamum, the latter still an important crop in India for its seeds, which provide edible oil. There is no clear evidence of the cultivation of rice, but the Harappā people grew and used cotton. It is not certain that irrigation was known, although this is possible. The main domestic animals known to modern India had already been tamed—humped and humpless cattle, buffaloes, goats, sheep, pigs, asses, dogs, and the domestic fowl. The elephant was well known, and may also have been tamed. The Harappā people may have known of the horse, since a few horse's teeth have been found in the lowest stratum of the Balūchistān site of Rānā Ghundāī, probably dating from several centuries earlier than the foundation of Harappā. This would indicate that horse-riding nomads found their way to N.-W. India in small numbers long before the Āryan invasion; but it is very doubtful whether the Harappā people possessed domestic horses themselves, and if they did they

must have been very rare animals. The bullock was probably the usual beast of burden.

On the basis of this thriving agricultural economy the Harappā people built their rather unimaginative but comfortable civilization. Their bourgeoisie had pleasant houses, and even their workmen, who may have been bondmen or slaves, had the comparative luxury of two-roomed brick-built cottages. Evidently a well organized commerce made these things possible. The cities undoubtedly traded with the village cultures of Balūchistān, where outposts of the Harappā culture have been traced, but many of their metals and semi-precious stones came from much longer distances. From Saurāshṭra and the Deccan they obtained conch shell, which they used freely in decoration, and several types of stone. Silver, turquoise and lapis lazuli were imported from Persia and Afghānistān. Their copper came either from Rājasthān or from Persia, while jadeite was probably obtained from Tibet or Central Asia.

Whether by sea or land, the products of the Indus reached Mesopotamia, for a number of typical Indus seals and a few other objects from the Indus Valley have been found in Sumer at levels dating between about 2300 and 2000 B.C., and some authorities believe that the land of *Melukka*, reached by sea from Sumer, and referred to in Sumerian documents, was the Indus Valley. Evidence of Sumerian exports to India is very scant and uncertain, and we must assume that they were mainly precious metals and raw materials. The finding of Indus seals suggests that merchants from India actually resided in Mesopotamia; their chief merchandise was probably cotton, which has always been one of India's staple exports, and which is known to have been used in later Babylonia. The recently excavated site at Lothal in Gujarāt has revealed harbour works, and the Harappā people may have been more nautically inclined than was formerly supposed. No doubt from their port of Lothal they were in touch with places farther south, and it is possibly thus that certain distinctive features of the Harappan culture penetrated to South India.

It seems that every merchant or mercantile family had a seal, bearing an emblem, often of a religious character, and a name or brief inscription in the tantalizingly indecipherable script. The standard Harappā seal was a square or oblong plaque, usually made of the soft stone called steatite, which was delicately engraved and hardened by heating (pl. V). The Mesopotamian civilizations employed cylinder seals, which were rolled on clay tablets, leaving an impressed band bearing the device and inscription of the seal; one or two such seals have been found in Mohenjo Daro, but with devices of the Harappā type. Over 2,000 seals have been discovered in the Indus

cities, and it would seem that every important citizen possessed one. Their primary purpose was probably to mark the ownership of property, but they doubtless also served as amulets, and were regularly carried on the persons of their owners. Generally they depict animals, such as the bull, buffalo, goat, tiger and elephant, or what appear to be scenes from religious legend. Their brief inscriptions, never of more than twenty symbols and usually of not more than ten, are the only significant examples of the Harappā script to have survived.

This script had some 270 characters, which were evidently pictographic in origin, but which had an ideographic or syllabic character. It may have been inspired by the earliest Sumerian script, which probably antedates it slightly, but it bears little resemblance to any of the scripts of the ancient Middle East, though attempts have been made to connect it with one or other of them. The most striking similarities are with the symbols used until comparatively recent times by the natives of Easter Island, in the eastern Pacific,[3] but the distance in space and time between the two cultures is so great that there is scarcely any possibility of contact or influence. We do not know what writing media were used, though it has been suggested that a small pot found at the lesser site of Chanhu Daro is an inkwell. Certainly the Harappans did not inscribe their documents on clay tablets, or some of these would have been found in the remains of their cities.

They were not on the whole an artistic people. No doubt they had a literature, with religious epics similar to those of Sumer and Babylon, but these are forever lost to us. The inner walls of their houses were coated with mud plaster, but if any paintings were made on these walls all trace of them has vanished. The outer walls, facing the streets, were apparently of plain brick. Architecture was austerely utilitarian, a few examples of simple decorative brickwork being the only ornamentation so far discovered. No trace of monumental sculpture has been found anywhere in the remains, and if any of the larger buildings were temples they contained no large icons, unless these were made of wood or other perishable material.

But if the Harappā folk could not produce works of art on a large scale they excelled in those of small compass. Their most notable artistic achievement was perhaps in their seal engravings, especially those of animals, which they delineated with powerful realism and evident affection. The great urus bull with its many dewlaps, the rhinoceros with knobbly armoured hide, the tiger roaring fiercely, and the many other animals (pl. V) are the work of craftsmen who studied their subjects and loved them.

Equally interesting are some of the human figurines. The red sandstone torso of a man (pl. IV*a*) is particularly impressive for its realism. The modelling of the rather heavy abdomen seems to look forward to the style of later Indian sculpture, and it has even been suggested that this figurine is a product of much later times, which by some strange accident found its way into the lower stratum; but this is very unlikely, for the figure has certain features, notably the strange indentations on the shoulders, which cannot be explained on this hypothesis. The bust of another male figure, in steatite (pl. III), seems to show an attempt at portraiture. It has been suggested that the head is that of a priest, with his eyes half closed in meditation, but it is possible that he is a man of Mongolian type, for the presence of this type in the Indus Valley, at least sporadically, has been proved by the discovery of a single skull at Mohenjo Daro.

Most striking of the figurines is perhaps the bronze "dancing girl" (pl. V*a*). Naked but for a necklace and a series of bangles almost covering one arm, her hair dressed in a complicated coiffure, standing in a provocative posture, with one arm on her hip and one lanky leg half bent, this young woman has an air of lively pertness, quite unlike anything in the work of other ancient civilizations. Her thin boyish figure, and those of the uninspiring mother goddesses, indicate, incidentally, that the canons of female beauty among the Harappā people were very different from those of later India. It has been suggested that this "dancing girl" is a representative of a class of temple dancers and prostitutes, such as existed in contemporary Middle Eastern civilizations and were an important feature of later Hindu culture, but this cannot be proved. It is not certain that the girl is a dancer, much less a temple dancer.

The Harappā people made brilliantly naturalistic models of animals, specially charming being the tiny monkeys and squirrels used as pinheads and beads (pl. IV*c*). For their children they made cattle with movable heads, model monkeys which would slide down a string, little toy carts, and whistles shaped like birds, all of terracotta. They also made rough terracotta statuettes of women, usually naked or nearly naked, but with elaborate head-dresses (fig. ii, c); these are probably icons of the Mother Goddess, and are so numerous that they seem to have been kept in nearly every home. They are very crudely fashioned, so we must assume that the goddess was not favoured by the upper classes, who commanded the services of the best craftsmen, but that her effigies were mass produced by humble potters to meet popular demand.

Though they had not completely given up the use of stone tools the Harappā people used implements of copper and bronze; but in

many respects they were technologically backward in comparison with Mesopotamia. The Sumerians very early invented knives and spearheads with ribs in the middle for extra strength, and axeheads with holes for the shafts; but the blades of Harappā were flat and easily bent, while the axeheads had to be lashed to their handles; only in the topmost levels do we find tools of a better type, which were probably left by invaders. In one respect the Harappā people were technically in advance of their contemporaries—they had devised a saw with undulating teeth, which allowed the dust to escape freely from the cut, and much simplified the carpenter's task. From this we may assume that they had particular skill in carpentry. They made beautiful beads of semi-precious stones and faience, and their pottery, though mostly plain and uninteresting, was well made, and a few specimens are delicately painted (fig. iv).

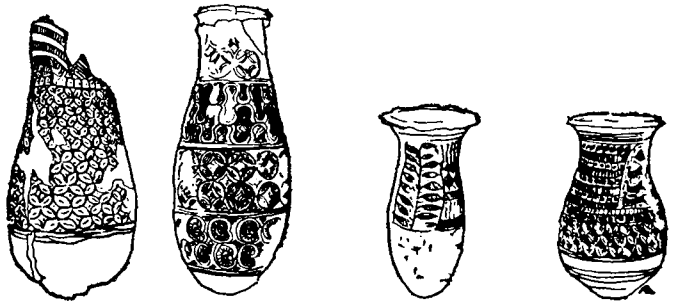


Fig. iv.—Painted Pottery of the Harappā Culture

The men wore robes which left one shoulder bare, and the garments of the upper classes were often richly patterned. Beards were worn, and men and women alike had long hair. The elaborate headdresses of the Mother Goddess figures probably had their counterparts in the festive attire of the richer women. The goddesses often wear only very short skirts, but on one seal women, perhaps priestesses, are depicted with longer skirts, reaching to just below the knee. The coiffures of the women were often elaborate, and pigtails were also popular, as in present-day India. Women loved jewellery, and wore heavy bangles in profusion, large necklaces, and earrings.

As far as we can reconstruct it from our fragmentary knowledge, the religion of the Harappā people had some features suggesting those characteristics of later Hinduism which are not to be found in the earliest stratum of Indian religious literature. The Mother Goddess, for instance, reappears only after the lapse of over a thousand years from the fall of Harappā. We have seen that she

was evidently the divinity of the people, and the upper classes seem to have preferred a god, who also shows features found in later Hinduism. As well as the figurines already mentioned, which may represent divinities, there are a few in terracotta of bearded nude men with coiled hair; their posture, rigidly upright, with the legs slightly apart, and the arms held parallel to the sides of the body but not touching it, closely resembles the stance called by the Jainas *kāyotsarga*, in which meditating teachers were often portrayed in later times; the repetition of this figure, in exactly the same posture, would suggest that he was a god. A terracotta mask of a horned deity has also been found.

The most striking deity of the Harappā culture is the horned god of the seals (pl. V). He is depicted on three specimens, in two seated on a stool or small dais, and in the third on the ground; in all three his posture is one well known to later Indian holy men, with the legs drawn up close to the body and the two heels touching, a position quite impossible to the average Westerner without much practice. The god's body is nude, except for many bangles and what appear to be necklaces, and he wears a peculiar headdress, consisting of a pair of horns, which may have been thought of as growing from his head, with a plant-like object between them. On the largest of the seals he is surrounded by four wild animals, an elephant, a tiger, a rhinoceros and a buffalo, and beneath his stool are two deer, as in the representations of the Buddha preaching his first sermon in the Deer-Park at Vārāṇasī. The animals, the plant-like growth from the head, and the fact that he is ithyphallic, indicate that he is a fertility god. His face has a fierce tigerish aspect, and one authority has suggested that it is not meant to be human;[4] to the right and left of the head are small protuberances which were believed by Sir John Marshall to represent a second and third face on either side. Marshall boldly called this god "Proto-Śiva", and the name has been generally accepted; certainly the horned god has much in common with the Śiva of later Hinduism, who is, in his most important aspect, a fertility deity, is known as *Paśupati*, "the Lord of Beasts", and is sometimes depicted with three faces.

Animals played a big part in the religion of the Indus people. Though all the animals shown on the seals may not have been particularly sacred, the bull occurs in contexts which prove that he at least was so; on many seals he stands before a peculiar object which is evidently not a manger, and has no utilitarian purpose, but is a "cult object", probably a table on which corn was grown for fertility rites.[5] On some seals small lines emerge from the table, which may represent the growing corn, no doubt eaten by the sacred bull as

part of the ceremony. The bull is usually depicted with a single horn, and has sometimes been referred to as a unicorn, though there is little doubt that the artist was trying to portray a normal bull, whose second horn was concealed by the first. In Hinduism the bull is specially associated with the god Śiva, but he does not seem to have been connected with the "Proto-Śiva" of Harappā, for he is not among the animals surrounding the god on the famous seal. The horns of the "Proto-Śiva" are not those of an ox but of a buffalo. The cow, so revered in later Hinduism, is nowhere depicted.

Certain trees were sacred, as they are in Hinduism today, notably the *pīpal*, which is specially honoured by Buddhists as the species under which the Buddha found enlightenment. One very interesting seal (pl. V*e*) depicts a horned goddess in a pīpal tree, worshipped by a figure also wearing horns, with a human-headed goat watching the ceremony and a row of seven pigtailed women, probably priestesses, in attendance.

One of the few traces of Sumerian contact is to be found in the seal showing a hero grappling with two tigers (pl. V*f*) —a variant of a famous Mesopotamian motif in which the hero Gilgamesh is depicted as fighting two lions. The rotund face of the hero, and the peculiar treatment of his hair, suggest that he represents the sun, and that the night-prowling tigers are the powers of darkness.

Phallic worship was an important element of Harappā religion. Many cone-shaped objects have been found, which are almost certainly formalized representations of the phallus. The *liṅga* or phallic emblem in later Hinduism is the symbol of the god Śiva, who is more commonly worshipped thus than as an icon; it is a fair inference that these objects were connected with the ithyphallic "Proto-Śiva" of the seals. It has been suggested that certain large ring-shaped stones are formalized representations of the female generative organ and were symbols of the Mother Goddess, but this is most doubtful.

Until Sir Mortimer Wheeler's work at Harappā in 1946 nothing was known with certainty of the way in which these people disposed of their dead; but from a cemetery then discovered, containing at least 57 graves, it appears that burial was the usual rite. The whole cemetery has not been excavated and the evidence is not yet fully assessed, but it is clear that the dead were buried in an extended posture with pottery vessels and personal ornaments.

Who were the people who built this great civilization? Some Indian historians have tried to prove that they were the Āryans, the people who composed the *Ṛg Veda*, but this is quite impossible. From the skeletal remains so far examined it appears that some of the

Harappans were people of the long-headed, narrow-nosed, slender Mediterranean type, found all over the ancient Middle East and in Egypt, and forming an important element of the Indian population at the present day. A second element was the Proto-Australoid, with flat nose and thick lips, related to the Australian aborigines and to some of the wild hill-tribes of modern India. A single skull of Mongolian type has been found, and one of the short-headed Alpine type. The bearded steatite head to which we have referred shows elements of both the latter types, while the bronze dancing girl seems certainly Proto-Australoid. Then as now, N.-W. India was the meeting-place of many races.

The modern South Indian is usually a blend of Mediterranean and Proto-Australoid, the two chief ethnic factors in the Harappā culture; moreover the Harappā religion seems to show many similarities with those elements of Hinduism which are specially popular in the Dravidian country. In the hills of Balūchistān, where the people of the Nāl and Zhob Cultures built their little villages, the Brāhuīs, though ethnically now predominantly Iranian, speak a Dravidian language. Thus it has been suggested that the Harappā folk were Dravidians, and Father H. Heras, one of the authorities who have tried to read their script, has even claimed that their language was a very primitive form of Tamil.

It might be suggested that the Harappā people consisted of a Proto-Australoid element, which at one time may have covered the whole of India, overlaid by a Mediterranean one, which entered India at a very early period, bringing with it the elements of civilization. Later, under the pressure of further invasions, this Mediterranean element spread throughout the sub-continent, and, again mixing with the indigenous peoples, formed the Dravidians. The chief objection to this theory is that the megaliths erected by the early Dravidians in South India have been shown to be not very ancient; a recent theory even holds that the Dravidians came to India from the west by sea as late as the second half of the 1st millennium B.C.[6] We can only say with certainty that some of the inhabitants of the Indus cities were of a type widely found further to the west, and that their descendants must survive in the present-day population of India.

It does not follow that the rest of India was wholly ignorant of the Harappā culture. Certain finds of copper implements in the district of Rānchī (S. Bihār) and elsewhere suggest that the peoples of North India learnt the use of metal from Harappā, for the blades are without the strengthening midrib; but the dating of these objects is very uncertain, and they may be much later than the fall of Harappā.

Certain pre-Ayran sites in the western half of northern India also

give evidence of Harappān cultural influence on peoples at a lower cultural level. Material from places such as Hastināpura, Kauśāmbī and the very recently excavated Atranjī Kherā near Alīgarh, together with Deccan sites like Navdātolī and Nevāsā, show that by the end of the 2nd millennium B.C. there were many settlements whose inhabitants lived in reasonably comfortable conditions, knowing the use of metal. They were apparently illiterate, but far from barbarous, and as our picture of prehistoric India grows more accurate it becomes clear that, even outside the region of the Harappā culture, many peoples in the sub-continent had attained a considerable degree of cultural progress. Even as far east as Bengal there was at least one metal-using settlement in the 2nd millennium—this was at a place now called Pāndu Rājar Dhibī, where a seal and pottery have been found somewhat resembling those of Minoan Crete, though we cannot be sure that this indicates actual contact. This latter site seems to indicate two strata of the population—a comparatively cultured, metal-using element living by the side of another which was still using microliths. The picture of prehistoric India beyond the region of the Harappā culture is rapidly becoming clearer, and in time it may be possible to trace in broad outline the movements of early peoples throughout the sub-continent, and solve many problems at present very obscure.

Whatever the case may be, pre-Āryan India made certain advances in husbandry for which the whole world owes her a debt. Cotton was to the best of our knowledge first used by the Harappā people. Rice was not one of their staple crops, nor was it grown in neolithic China, whose main food crop was millet. Wild rice is known in Eastern India, and it is here, in the swampy Gangā Valley, that it was probably first cultivated by the neolithic contemporaries of the Harappā people. The water buffalo, known to the Harappā people, was a comparatively late arrival in China, and it may have been first domesticated in the Gangetic Plain, though some authorities believe that it originated in the Philippine Islands.

Perhaps the most widely appreciated of prehistoric India's gifts to the world is the domestic fowl. Ornithologists are agreed that all domestic species descend from the wild Indian jungle fowl. The Harappā people knew the domestic fowl, though its remains are few and it is not depicted on the seals. It was probably first tamed by neolithic Indians in the Gangā Valley, whence it found its way by the Burma route to China, where it appears in the middle of the 2nd millennium. The Egyptians knew it at about the same time, as a rare luxury bird.[7] Clearly India, even at this remote period, was not wholly cut off from the rest of the world.

THE END OF THE INDUS CITIES

When Harappā was first built the citadel was defended by a great turreted wall, 40 feet wide at the base and 35 feet high. In the course of the centuries this wall was refaced more strongly than before, though there is no evidence that the city was dangerously threatened by enemies. But towards the end of Harappā's existence its defences were further strengthened, and one gateway was wholly blocked. Danger threatened from the west.

First to suffer were the Balūchistān villages. The earliest level of the site of Rānā Ghundāī shows that bands of horse-riding invaders were present in the region before 3000 B.C., but they soon disappeared, to give way to the peasant culture which occupied the site in the 3rd millennium and was contemporary with the Indus cities. Then, in 2000 B.C. or a little later, the village was burnt, and a new, coarser type of pottery appears—evidently invaders had occupied the site. Soon afterwards came other invaders, using unpainted encrusted pottery. Similar though less complete evidence appears in other North Balūchistān sites, while in South Balūchistān people of an intrusive culture founded a settlement at Shāhī Tump, not far from Sutkagen Dor, which was the most westerly outpost of the Harappā Culture. The Shāhī Tump people used the shaft-hole axe and round copper seals, and replaced the earlier local culture, known to archæologists as the Kullī Culture. In the last phase of the life of Mohenjo Daro painted pottery and stone vessels resembling those of Balūchistān appear, and this may indicate a large influx of Kullī refugees, who brought their crafts with them.

After the barbarians had conquered the outlying villages the ancient laws and rigid organization of the Indus cities must have suffered great strain. At Mohenjo Daro large rooms were divided into smaller ones, and mansions became tenements; potters' kilns were built within the city boundaries, and one even in the middle of a street. The street plan was no longer maintained. Hoards of jewellery were buried. Evidently the city was overpopulated and law and order were less well kept, perhaps because the barbarians were already ranging the provinces and the city was full of newcomers, whom the city fathers could not force into the age-old pattern of its culture, very frequent flooding much worsened the situation.

When the end came it would seem that most of the citizens of Mohenjo Daro had fled; but a group of huddled skeletons in one of the houses and one skeleton of a woman lying on the steps of a well suggest that a few stragglers were overtaken by the invaders. In this level a fine copper axe has been found, with a very strong

shafthole and an adze blade opposite that of the axe—a beautiful tool, adapted both for war and peace, and superior to anything the Harappā people possessed (fig. v). Swords with strengthening midribs also make their appearance. A single pot burial of a man of rather Mongolian type may be that of one of the invaders.

From Harappā comes evidence of a different kind. Here, near the older cemetery of interments, is another cemetery on a higher level, containing fractional burials in pots of men with short-headed Armenoid skulls. A skull of similar type was buried in the citadel itself. At Chanhu Daro, on the lower Indus, the Harappā people were replaced by squatters, living in small huts with fireplaces, innovations which suggest that they came from a colder climate. These people, though unsophisticated in many respects, had superior

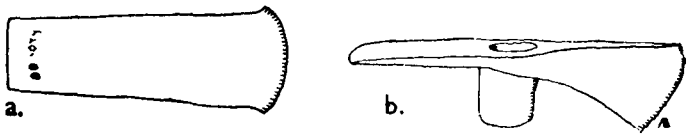


Fig. v.—Axes of the Indus Cities
a. Inscribed unsocketed axe-head. b. Shaft-hole axe-adze

tools and weapons. Similar settlements were made in Balūchistān at about the same time. Among the scanty remains of these invaders there is clear evidence of the presence of the horse. The Indus valley fell to barbarians who triumphed not only through greater military prowess, but also because they were equipped with better weapons, and had learnt to make full use of the swift and terror-striking beast of the steppes. In other parts of India, however, the impact of the invaders was not immediately felt, and it appears that the Harappā city of Lothal, in Gujarāt, survived long after its parent cities had fallen, and its culture seems to have developed gradually, merging into that of the later period with no sharp break in continuity.

The date of these great events can only be fixed very approximately from synchronisms with the Middle East. Sporadic traces of contact can be found between the Indus cities and Sumeria, and there is some reason to believe that this contact continued under the First Dynasty of Babylon, which produced the great lawgiver Hammurabi. This dynasty was also overwhelmed by barbarians, the Kassites, who came from the hills of Iran and conquered by virtue of their horse-drawn chariots. After the Kassite invasion no trace of contact with the Indus can be found in Mesopotamia, and it is therefore

likely that the Indus cities vanished at about the same time as the dynasty of Hammurabi. Earlier authorities placed the latter event in the first centuries of the 2nd millennium B.C., but new evidence, which appeared shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War, has resulted in a revised chronology. The fall of the First Babylonian Dynasty is now thought to have taken place about 1600 B.C.

The earliest Indian literary source we possess is the *Ṛg Veda*, most of which was composed in the second half of the 2nd millennium. It is evidently the work of an invading people, who have not yet fully subjugated the original inhabitants of N.-W. India. In his great report on the excavations at Mohenjo Daro, Sir John Marshall maintained that some two centuries or more elapsed between the fall of the Indus cities and the invasion of the Āryans; but the more recent excavations at Harappā and elsewhere, the revision of the chronology of Babylon, and indications in the *Ṛg Veda* itself, have all tended to reduce the gap. Many competent authorities, led by Sir R. Mortimer Wheeler, now believe that Harappā was overthrown by the Āryans. It is suggested that the interments in the later cemetery at Harappā are those of "true Vedic Āryans", and that the forts or citadels which the Vedic war-god Indra is said to have destroyed included Harappā in their number.

There is not enough evidence to say with certainty that the destroyers of the Indus cities were members of the group of related tribes whose priests composed the *Ṛg Veda*, but it is probable that the fall of this great civilization was partly due to the widespread migratory movements of charioteering peoples which altered the face of the whole civilized world in the 2nd millennium B.C.

INDO-EUROPEANS AND ĀRYANS

The invaders of India called themselves *Āryas*, a word generally anglicized into Āryans. The name was also used by the ancient Persians, and survives in the word *Irān*, while *Eire*, the name of the most westerly land reached by Indo-European peoples in ancient times, is also cognate. Here we cannot discuss the many theories on the origin of these people, but can only give that which seems to us most reasonable, and which, we believe, would be accepted by a majority of those who specialize in the subject.

About 2000 B.C. the great steppeland which stretches from Poland to Central Asia was inhabited by semi-nomadic barbarians, who were tall, comparatively fair, and mostly long-headed. They had tamed the horse, which they harnessed to light chariots with spoked wheels, of a much faster and better type than the lumbering ass-drawn

cars with four solid wheels which were the best means of transport known to contemporary Sumer. They were mainly pastoral, but practised a little agriculture. There is no evidence that they were in direct contact with the Sumerians, but they had adopted some Mesopotamian innovations, notably the shaft-hole axe. In the early part of the 2nd millennium, whether from pressure of population, desiccation of pasture lands, or from both causes, these people were on the move. They migrated in bands westwards, southwards and eastwards, conquering local populations, and intermarrying with them to form a ruling class. They brought with them their patrilinear family system, their worship of sky gods, and their horses and chariots. In most of the lands in which they settled their original language gradually adapted itself to the tongues of the conquered peoples. Some invaded Europe, to become the ancestors of the Greeks, Latins, Celts and Teutons. Others appeared in Anatolia, and from the mixture of these with the original inhabitants there arose the great empire of the Hittites. Yet others remained in their old home, the ancestors of the later Baltic and Slavonic people. And yet others moved southwards to the Caucasus and the Iranian tableland, whence they made many attacks on the Middle Eastern civilizations. The Kassites, who conquered Babylon, were led by men of this stock. In the 14th century B.C. there appeared in N.-E. Syria a people called Mitanni, whose kings had Indo-Iranian names, and a few of whose gods are familiar to every student of Indian religion: *Indara*, *Uruvna* (the Vedic god Varuṇa), *Mitira*, and *Našatiya*. As well as those of the Mitanni, other chiefs in Syria and Palestine had names of Indo-Iranian type.

The marauding tribesmen gradually merged with the older populations of the Middle East, and the ancient civilizations, invigorated by fresh blood and ideas, rose to new heights of material culture; but the culture of the Indus, weakened by recurrent floods, could neither withstand nor absorb the invaders. The culture which was to succeed that of Harappā was, as we shall see, diametrically opposed to its predecessor. Only after many centuries did some elements of the older civilization, kept alive no doubt by the poorer people and serfs, begin to influence the conquerors.

The Āryan invasion of India was not a single concerted action, but one covering centuries and involving many tribes, perhaps not all of the same race and language. It seems certain that many of the old village cultures of the western hills were destroyed before the cities of the Indus vanished, but otherwise the course of Āryan expansion cannot be plotted, owing to the paucity of material remains. Evidently the invaders did not take to living in cities, and after the fall

of Harappā and Mohenjo Daro the Parjāb and Sind became a land of little villages, with buildings of wood and reed the remains of which have long since perished. For centuries after the fall of Harappā this part of India is almost an archæological blank, which at present can only be filled by literary sources.

THE ĀRYANS IN INDIA. THE PROTO-HISTORIC PERIOD

Among the many peoples who entered India in the 2nd millennium B.C. was a group of related tribes whose priests had perfected a very advanced poetic technique, which they used for the composition of hymns in praise of their gods, to be sung at sacrifices. These tribes, chief of which was that of the Bharatas, settled mainly in East Panjāb and in the region between the Satlaj and the Yamunā which later became known as Brahmāvarta. The hymns composed by their priests in their new home were carefully handed down by word of mouth, and early in the 1st millennium B.C. were collected and arranged. They were still not committed to writing, but by now they were looked on as so sacred that even minor alterations in their text were not permitted, and the priestly schools which preserved them devised the most remarkable and effective system of checks and counter checks to ensure their purity. Even when the art of writing was widely known in India the hymns were rarely written, but, thanks to the brilliant feats of memory of many generations of brāhmaṇs, and to the extreme sanctity which the hymns were thought to possess, they have survived to the present day in a form which, from internal evidence, appears not to have been seriously tampered with for nearly three thousand years. This great collection of hymns is the *Ṛg Veda*, still in theory the most sacred of the numerous sacred texts of the Hindus.

The period of the Vedas, Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads is a sort of transition from prehistory to history. If history, as distinct from archæology, is the study of the human past from written sources, then India's history begins with the Āryans. The *Ṛg Veda*, and the great body of oral religious literature which followed it in the first half of the 1st millennium B.C., belong to the living Hindu tradition. The Vedic hymns are still recited at weddings and funerals, and in the daily devotions of the brāhmaṇ. Thus they are part of historical India, and do not belong to her buried prehistoric past. But they tell us little about the great events of the time, except in irritatingly vague incidental references; even on social conditions their information is scant; only on religion and thought is the historian more fully informed.

Yet from the hymns of the *Ṛg* and *Atharva Vedas*, the sacrificial instructions of the Brāhmaṇas, and the mysticism of the Upaniṣads, the outlines of a culture emerge, though often all too vaguely, and here and there we see the faint wraiths of great sages and tribal leaders, whose importance for their times was such that their names were recorded in sacred literature. Around these phantoms later tradition draped glittering mantles of legend, legend in which many Indians still implicitly believe, and which, in other contexts, is exceedingly important. But when the mantles are removed only vague shadows remain, little more than the names of chieftains who three thousand years ago waged successful war against their enemies. For the period before the time of the Buddha we can only trace the general character of the civilization which produced the Vedic literature and give a brief and tentative sketch of its expansion.

THE CULTURE OF THE *ṚG VEDA*

No real synchronisms are contained in the *Ṛg Veda* itself, to give us any certain information on the date of its composition. Some authorities in the past claimed an exceedingly early date for it, on the basis of tradition and ambiguous astronomical references in the hymns themselves—it was even believed by one very respected Indian scholar that it went back to 6000 B.C. The discovery of the Indus cities, which have nothing in common with the culture described in the Veda and are evidently pre-Vedic, proves that the hymns cannot have been composed before the end of Harappā. The great development in culture, religion and language which is evident in the later Vedic literature shows that a long period must have elapsed between the time of the composition of the last hymns of the *Ṛg Veda* and the days of the Buddha—perhaps as much as 500 years. It is therefore probable that most of the *Ṛg Veda* was composed between 1500 and 1000 B.C., though the composition of some of the most recent hymns and the collation of the whole collection may have taken place a century or two later.

When the hymns were written the focus of Āryan culture was the region between the Yamunā and Satlaj (*Śutudrī*), south of the modern Ambālā, and along the upper course of the river Sarasvatī. The latter river is now an insignificant stream, losing itself in the desert of Rājasthān, but it then flowed broad and strong, and probably joined the Indus below the confluence of the Satlaj. The Vedic poets knew the Himālayas but not the land south of the Yamunā, and they did not mention the Vindhyas. To the east the

Āryans had not expanded far beyond the Yamunā, and the Gangā is mentioned only in one late hymn.

At this time the Āryans had not wholly subjugated the indigenous inhabitants. Though many hymns refer to battles between one Āryan tribe and another, there is, underlying this intertribal rivalry, a sense of solidarity against the *Dāsas* and *Dasyus*, who evidently represent the survivors of the Harappā Culture, and kindred peoples of the Panjāb and the North-West. The Dāsas are described as dark and ill-favoured, bull-lipped, snub-nosed, worshippers of the phallus, and of hostile speech. They were rich in cattle, and dwelt in fortified places called *pur*, of which the Āryan war-god Indra had destroyed hundreds. The main work of destroying the settlements of the Dāsas had been accomplished some time before the composition of the hymns, and the great battles which must then have taken place were already misted over with legend; but the Dāsas were still capable of massing armies of 10,000 men against the invaders.

Other enemies of the Āryans were the *Paṇis*, who are described as wealthy people who refused to patronize the Vedic priests, and who stole the cattle of the Āryans. They were not so strongly hated as the Dāsas, and their settlements seem often to have continued unmolested. It has been suggested that the Paṇis were Semitic traders, but the evidence is so slight that this conclusion cannot be accepted.

The Āryans were not uninfluenced by the earlier inhabitants. In classical Sanskrit the word *dāsa* regularly means "slave" or "bondman", and in the later hymns of the *Ṛg Veda* it was already acquiring that meaning, while the feminine form *dāsī* is used in the sense of "slave-girl" throughout the book; but, though many of the vanquished Dāsas must have been enslaved, some seem to have come to terms with the conquerors, and one Dāsa chief is mentioned as following Āryan ways and patronizing the brāhmaṇs.[8] One result of this contact of Āryan and non-Āryan is evident even in the earliest stratum of the *Ṛg Veda*, the language of which is appreciably affected by non-Indo-European influences. All Indian languages, from Vedic to the modern vernaculars, contain a series of sounds, the retroflex or cerebral consonants, which cannot be traced in any other Indo-European tongues, not even in Old Iranian, which is closely akin to Sanskrit. These sounds must have developed quickly, from the efforts of non-Āryans to master the language of their conquerors. No doubt the invaders often married indigenous women, whose children were bilingual, and after a few generations the Āryans' original language showed the effect of the admixture of aboriginal blood. Numerous words in the *Ṛg Veda* are not connected with any known Indo-European roots, and were evidently

borrowed from the natives. Non-Āryan influence on religion and culture must also have been felt very early, and the gradual disappearance of much of the original Indo-European heritage beneath successive layers of non-Āryan innovation can be traced through the early religious literature of India.

The primitiveness of early Āryan society was much exaggerated by some 19th-century Indologists, who thought they found in the highly formalized and rigidly controlled style of the *Ṛg Veda* the first outpourings of the human spirit and an echo of Rousseau's noble savage. In fact even when the earliest hymns were composed the Āryans were not savages, but were on the fringes of civilization. Their military technique was in advance of that of the Middle East, their priestly schools had raised the tribal sacrifice to a fine art, and their poetry was elaborate and formalized. On the other hand they had not developed a city civilization. The complete absence of any words connected with writing in the *Ṛg Veda*, despite its size and the many contexts in which such words might be expected to occur, is almost certain proof that the Āryans were illiterate. They were a people of warlike stockbreeders, organized in tribes rather than in kingdoms. Their culture bears a generic likeness to that of *Beowulf*, the earlier Icelandic sagas, and the old Irish prose epics, and was somewhat less advanced than that depicted in the *Iliad*.

The tribes were ruled by chiefs who bore the title *rājā*, a word related to the Latin *rex*. The rājā was not an absolute monarch, for the government of the tribe was in part the responsibility of the tribal councils, the *sabhā* and *samiti*. These two words occur together in many contexts and the distinction between them is not wholly clear—possibly some tribes called their governing body *sabhā* and others *samiti*, while yet others had both assemblies, the first an inner council of a few great men of the tribe and the second a larger gathering of heads of families.[9] These two bodies exerted much influence on the king and their approval was necessary to ensure his accession. Some tribes seem to have had no hereditary chief, but were governed directly by the tribal council, for in one passage[10] we read of kings sitting down together in the assembly, which suggests that, as in some later oligarchic clans, the title of rājā was taken by all the great men of the tribe, who governed it through a folk-moot.

But hereditary kingship was the rule, and the rājā, dwelling in a fine hall, had a rudimentary court, attended by courtiers (*sabhāsad*) and chiefs of septs (*grāmaṇī*). Already he had a general (*senānī*), who was responsible under the king for minor campaigns and cattle-raids against neighbouring tribes. Very important was the chief priest (*purohita*), who by his sacrifices ensured the prosperity of the

tribe in peace and its victory in war. Often the purohita appears as a tribal medicine-man, performing magical ceremonies and muttering spells for victory both before and during battle.

The Āryans looked on the king primarily as a leader in war, responsible for the defence of the tribe. He was in no sense divine at this early period, and had no religious functions, except to order sacrifices for the good of the tribe and to support the priests who performed them. The priest-king of some other early cultures had no counterpart in Vedic India. There was no regular revenue system and the king was maintained by the tribute of his subjects and the booty won in battle. If the king had judicial functions, as he certainly had later, there is no reference to them; murder was probably punished by a system of wergeld, as with the Anglo-Saxons and some other early Indo-European peoples, but beyond this we have no information on the administration of justice in the time of the *Ṛg Veda*.

Several chieftains are mentioned by name, and around some of them later tradition has embroidered very unreliable stories, but only one rājā is recorded in the *Ṛg Veda* as performing any deed of historical importance. This is Sudās, king of the Bharatas, the tribe dwelling on the upper reaches of the Sarasvatī River. Three poems of the collection describe the great "Battle of the Ten Kings" at which Sudās defeated a coalition of ten tribes of the Panjāb and the North-West, on the banks of the River Paruṣṇī, the modern Rāvī. The most powerful of these ten tribes was that of the Pūrus, who dwelt on the lower Sarasvatī and were the Bharatas' western neighbours; their king, Purukutsa, was apparently killed in the battle. In the succeeding age we hear no more of either Bharatas or Pūrus, but a new tribe, that of the Kurus, controls the old land of the Bharatas and much of the northern Gangā-Yamunā Doāb. In the traditional genealogy of the Kuru chiefs both Bharata and Pūru occur as names of their ancestors, and they are referred to indiscriminately as "sons of Bharata" and "sons of Pūru". The two tribes no doubt merged as a result of the conquest of one by the other, and this process of fusion, whereby tribes became peoples and nations, must have been going on all through the Vedic period.

When the Āryans entered India there was already a class division in their tribal structure. Even in the earliest hymns we read of the *kṣatra*, the nobility, and the *viś*, the ordinary tribesmen, and the records of several other early Indo-European peoples suggest that a tribal aristocracy was a feature of Indo-European society even before the tribes migrated from their original home. As they settled among the darker aboriginals the Āryans seem to have laid greater stress than before on purity of blood, and class divisions hardened, to

exclude those Dāsas who had found a place on the fringes of Āryan society, and those Āryans who had intermarried with the Dāsas and adopted their ways. Both these groups were low in the social scale. At the same time the priests, whose sacrificial lore was becoming more and more complicated, and who therefore required greater skill and training, were arrogating higher privileges to themselves. By the end of the Ṛg Vedic period society was divided into four great classes, and this fourfold division was given religious sanction and looked on as fundamental. This is evident from one of the most important hymns of the collection, in which the four classes are said to have emanated from the dismembered primeval man, who was sacrificed by the gods at the beginning of the world (p. 242f).

The four classes, priest (*brāhmaṇa*), warrior (*kṣatriya*), peasant (*vaiśya*) and serf (*śūdra*), were crystallizing throughout the period of the *Ṛg Veda*. They have survived to the present day. The Sanskrit word used for them, *varna*, means "colour", and suggests their origin in the development of the old tribal class structure through contact with people of different complexion and alien culture. The term varṇa does not mean, and has never meant, "caste", by which convenient word it is often loosely translated (p. 149).

The basic unit of Āryan society was the family. A group of related families formed a sept or *grāma*, a term which later regularly meant "village", but which in the *Ṛg Veda* usually refers to a group of kinsfolk rather than to a settlement. The family was staunchly patrilinear and patriarchal. The wife, though she enjoyed a respectable position, was definitely subordinate to her husband. Marriage was usually monogamous, and apparently indissoluble, for no reference to divorce or the remarriage of widows occurs in the *Ṛg Veda*.

The Āryans followed a mixed pastoral and agricultural economy, in which cattle played a predominant part. The farmer prayed for increase of cattle; the warrior expected cattle as booty; the sacrificial priest was rewarded for his services with cattle. Cattle were in fact a sort of currency, and values were reckoned in heads of cattle. There is no evidence that they were held sacred at this time—the cow is in one or two places given the epithet "not to be killed", but this may only imply her economic importance. In any case it is quite clear that both oxen and cows were slaughtered for food.

The horse was almost as important as the cow, though mainly for military reasons. The chestnut horses of the Āryans, harnessed to light chariots, must have terrified the people of the Indus Valley, as the horses of the conquistadores terrified the Aztecs and Incas. A few hymns of the *Ṛg Veda* according to the rubric describe a divine horse Dadhikrā, and contain some of the finest lines on the horse

in the world's literature, recalling the famous passage in praise of the war-horse in the Book of Job.[11]

> "Rushing to glory, to the capture of herds,
> swooping down as a hungry falcon,
> eager to be first, he darts amid the ranks of the chariots,
> happy as a bridegroom making a garland,
> spurning the dust and champing at the bit.
>
> "And the victorious steed and faithful,
> his body obedient [to his driver] in battle,
> speeding on through the mêlée,
> stirs up the dust to fall on his brows.
>
> "And at his deep neigh, like the thunder of heaven,
> the foemen tremble in fear,
> for he fights against thousands, and none can resist him,
> so terrible is his charge."[12]

Though there are passages which refer to riding, the horse is more frequently described as the motive power of the chariot. References to this vehicle—a favourite subject for similes and metaphors—are so numerous that it is possible to reconstruct it in considerable detail. It was a light chariot with two spoked wheels, drawn by two horses yoked abreast, and carrying two warriors.

Among other domestic animals the Āryans knew the goat and the sheep, which provided wool, their chief textile. The elephant is only mentioned in late hymns, and was rarely if ever domesticated. A divine bitch, Saramā, plays an important part in a legend which cannot be fully reconstructed, but the dog did not mean as much to the people of the *Ṛg Veda* as it did to a kindred Āryan pastoral people, the ancient Iranians, who made it a sacred animal.

Though stockbreeding receives more attention from the poets, agriculture must also have been important, but it seems to have been looked on as rather plebeian, and therefore was not much referred to. Only one word is used for corn—*yava*, which later meant barley, but at this period may have implied all species of cultivated grain. There are references to ploughing and reaping, and others which have been doubtfully interpreted as showing that the Āryans knew something of irrigation.

The Āryans were a wild, turbulent people and had few of the taboos of later India. They were much addicted to inebriating drinks, of which they had at least two, *soma* and *surā*. Soma was drunk at sacrifices and its use was sanctified by religion (p. 237f). Surā was

purely secular, and was evidently very potent; in more than one passage it is mentioned with disapproval by the priestly poets.

The Āryans loved music, and played the flute, lute and harp, to the accompaniment of cymbals and drums. They used a heptatonic scale, similar to our own major scale, which is thought by some to have originated in Sumeria and to have been spread by the Indo-European peoples. There are references to singing and dancing, and to dancing-girls, who may have been professionals.

Besides these amusements the Āryans delighted in gambling. At all times India has loved to gamble. In the remains of the Indus cities numerous dice have been found, and the Āryans have left their own record of their gambling propensities in the beautiful "Gamester's Lament", one of the few predominantly secular poems which by lucky chance have found their way into the *Ṛg Veda* (p. 405ff).

Though they had not developed a city civilization, and did not build in stone or brick, the Āryans were technically well equipped. Their bronze-smiths were highly skilled, and produced tools and weapons much superior to those of the Harappā Culture. They, and the carpenters and chariot-makers, are frequently referred to in the hymns with much respect. There is no good reason to believe that iron was used in India at this period. *Ayas*, one of the terms for metal in the *Ṛg Veda*, came to mean iron at a later date, and is related to the German word *Eisen* and the English *iron*; but it is also akin to the Latin *aes*, meaning bronze, and it certainly means this metal or copper in the *Ṛg Veda*. No trace of iron has been found in the upper levels of the remains of the Indus Culture, and at this period iron implements were rare, even in the advanced civilizations of Mesopotamia. Iron ore is common enough, but its smelting demands higher skill than the Āryans had developed. At the time of the composition of the *Ṛg Veda* the process of smelting iron was hardly known outside Anatolia, where the Hittite kings tried to keep it a secret. Only at the very end of the 2nd millennium did the use of iron begin to spread widely over the civilized world, and it is very unlikely that it reached India before this time.[13]

As might be expected of a people without cities, the Āryans did not have an advanced economic system. In Mesopotamia the silver shekel, though unstamped, served as a means of exchange, but the Āryans relied for their unit of value and means of barter on the unwieldy cow. The *niṣka*, a term later used for a gold coin, is also mentioned as a sort of currency, but at this time was probably a gold ornament of some kind. There is no evidence of a regular class of merchants or moneylenders, though indebtedness is sometimes referred to.

The religion of the early Āryans, about which we know much more than we do about their everyday life and customs, will be discussed in a later chapter (p. 234ff).

THE LATER VEDIC AGE

Between the composition of the *Ṛg Veda* and the age of the Buddha, when we begin to trace the history of India with comparative clearness, a period of some four or five hundred years elapsed. During this time the Āryans pushed eastwards down the Gangā, and their culture adapted itself to changed conditions. Recently Indian archæologists have excavated parts of a few sites which belong to this period, such as Hastināpura, Ahicchatrā and Kauśāmbī, the lowest levels of which have been reasonably fixed at between 900 and 600 B.C., the time of the later Vedas.[14] The town of Hastināpura was almost completely destroyed by flood at the end of its existence, and little remains but sherds of painted grey pottery, a few copper implements, and traces of houses of unbaked brick. Kauśāmbī has produced similar pottery, a little iron, and remains of a well made city wall faced with burnt brick, but there is some disagreement among archæologists as to its dating. The typical pottery has been found from the Sarasvatī Valley in the west to Ahicchatrā, near the upper Gangā, in the east. With these exceptions we have scarcely any direct knowledge of the period, and our only important sources are sacred texts, the later Vedas, Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads, which will be treated elsewhere from a religious and literary point of view (p. 242ff).

Besides these contemporary documents there are many legends which seem to refer to this period contained in other sources, notably the Epics and Purāṇas; but these are so overlaid by the accretions of later centuries that no attempt at interpreting them historically has so far won general acceptance, and it may never be possible to sift the fact from the fiction. Even the social conditions described in the narrative portions of the Epics, the stories of which may have been composed in a primitive form at this time, do not always refer to this age, but to the obscure period between the Mauryan and Guptan Empires. Attempts of some earlier authorities to create an "Epic Age" in the history of India, as distinct from the age of the later Vedas, are quite unconvincing. There was no Epic Age, and for our knowledge of this period we may only rely on the literature of the period itself. This, like the *Ṛg Veda*, is wholly religious, and tells us little more than the older source about the history of the time.

One event, not definitely recorded in these contemporary sources,

but so strongly remembered that it must have been very important, was the great battle of Kurukṣetra, not far from the modern Delhī. This battle, magnified to titanic proportions, formed the basis of the story of the greatest of India's epics, the *Mahābhārata*. According to the legend the whole of India, from Sind to Assam and from the Himālayas to Cape Comorin, took part in the war, which arose through a dynastic dispute in the great Kuru tribe (p. 410). It is by no means certain that the war was in fact a civil one, and the story has been plausibly interpreted as a muddled recollection of the conquest of the Kurus by a tribe of Mongoloid type from the hills. But certainly a great war took place, and succeeding generations looked on it as marking the end of an epoch. The names of many of the heroes of the *Mahābhārata* may genuinely be those of contemporary chieftains, but we must regretfully record that the story is of less use to the historian even than the *Iliad*, or most of the Norse and Irish saga literature. It compares better with the *Nibelungenlied*, the product of an age very different from that which it purports to describe, and the result of the assimilation of many diverse martial traditions. It is as futile to try to reconstruct the political and social history of India in the 10th century B.C. from the *Mahābhārata* as it would be to write the history of Britain immediately after the evacuation of the Romans from Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*.

According to the most popular later tradition the Mahābhārata War took place in 3102 B.C., which, in the light of all evidence, is quite impossible. More reasonable is another tradition, placing the war in the 15th century B.C., but this is also several centuries too early in the light of our archæological knowledge. Probably it took place around the beginning of the 9th century B.C.; such a date seems to fit well with the scanty archæological remains of the period, and there is some evidence in the Brāhmaṇa literature itself to show that it cannot have been much earlier.[15] From this time onwards the centre of culture and political power shifted to the Gangetic Doāb and the Kuru capital, Hastināpura or Āsandīvant. Throughout most of the later Vedic period the Kurus and their neighbours the Pañcālas were the greatest and the most civilized of Indian peoples. The names of several Kuru kings have been passed down in legend and two at any rate, Parikṣit and Janamejaya, are mentioned in the literature of the time as mighty conquerors.

Early in this period the Āryans pressed further eastwards, and set up kingdoms in Kosala, to the east of the Doāb, and in Kāśī, the region of Vārāṇasī.* The former, which grew in importance with time, was

* Until recently known as Benares or Banaras. The old Sanskrit form of the name has now been officially revived.

the realm of Rāma, the hero of the second of the great Indian epics, the *Rāmāyaṇa* (p. 414f). For all his later fame the literature of the period ignores Rāma and his father Daśaratha completely, so we must conclude that both were comparatively insignificant chieftains, whose exploits were by chance remembered, to be elaborated and magnified by later generations of bards until, around the beginning of the Christian Era, they received their final form. It is not even certain that Rāma was a king of Kosala at all, for the earliest version of the legend that we possess makes him a king of Vārāṇasī, which was for a time a kingdom of some importance, but was conquered by Kosala towards the end of this period.

Another important kingdom was Videha, to the east of the River Gandak and north of the Gangā. One of the Brāhmaṇas[16] tells that once the fire-god Agni moved eastwards, burning up the earth, until he came to the River Sadānīrā (the modern Gandak), where he stopped. In his wake followed a chieftain from the River Sarasvatī, Videgha Māthava. Before his arrival no Āryan would cross the Sadānīrā, because the purifying fire-god had not burnt the land on its eastern bank; but Agni instructed Videgha to carry him over, and thus the land of Videha was Āryanized, and took its name from that of its first colonizer. The legend is important because it is the only significant account of the process of colonization in an approximately contemporary source. In the progress of Agni, burning up the earth, we see not only the gradual eastward expansion of the Āryan fire cult, but also the clearing of jungle and waste by burning, as bands of migrating warrior peasants founded new settlements.

Though Rāma is ignored in the literature of the period his traditional father-in-law, Janaka king of Videha, is more than once mentioned and is clearly a historical figure. He was a great patron of the hermits and wandering philosophers who propagated the new mystical doctrines of the Upaniṣads, and he himself took part in their discussions. By the time of the Buddha the kingdom of Janaka had disappeared, and his capital city, Mithilā, had lost its importance. The kingdom was replaced by the tribal confederacy of the Vṛjjis, headed by the Licchavis, who may have been Mongols from the hills, but were more probably a second wave of Āryan immigrants.

South of Videha, on the right bank of the Gangā, was the region known as Magadha, then of little account. It was not wholly Āryanized, but bands of nomadic renegade Āryans called *vrātyas*, who did not follow the Vedic rites, roamed the land with their flocks and herds. Only in the time of the Buddha, under the great king Bimbisāra, did Magadha begin to show the energy and initiative which were to lead to the setting up of the first great Indian empire. To

the east of Magadha, on the borders of the modern Bengal, the small kingdom of Aṅga had arisen, while, beyond Aṅga, Bengal and Assam were still outside the pale of Āryan civilization.

Thus the texts of the period are mainly concerned with the region from the Yamunā eastwards to the borders of Bengal. The area south of the Gangā receives little attention, and it has been reasonably suggested that the main line of Āryan penetration was not down the river, the banks of which were then probably thick swampy jungle, but along the Himālayan foothills. Expansion was not wholly confined to the north of the Gangā, however. Contemporary literature has little to say about the rest of Northern India, but conditions at the time of the Buddha were such that it must have been colonized some time previously, and this is confirmed by tradition. On the Yamunā the tribe of the Yādavas had settled in the region of Mathurā, while further down the river the kingdom of Vatsa was ruled from its capital of Kauśāmbī, very important in later times. By the end of this period the Āryans had advanced down the Chambal River, had settled in Mālwā, and had reached the Narmadā where there was an important city, Mahiṣmatī. Probably parts of the N.-W. Deccan were also under Āryan influence. According to the Epic tradition Saurāshtra was colonized by a branch of the Yādavas, led by the great hero Kṛṣṇa, and, though the association of Kṛṣṇa with the story is probably unhistorical (p. 306f), the legend may be founded on fact.

While the Āryans had by now expanded far into India their old home in the Panjāb and the North-West was practically forgotten. Later Vedic literature mentions it rarely, and then usually with disparagement and contempt, as an impure land where the Vedic sacrifices are not performed. It may have been once more invaded by Indo-Iranian tribes who did not follow the orthodox rites.

The culture of the later Vedic period was materially much in advance of that of the *Ṛg Veda*. The Āryan tribes were by now consolidated in little kingdoms, which had not wholly lost their tribal character, but had permanent capitals and a rudimentary administrative system. The old tribal assemblies are still from time to time referred to, but their power was waning rapidly, and by the end of this period the king's autocracy was in most cases only limited by the power of the brāhmaṇs, the weight of tradition, and the force of public opinion, which was always of some influence in ancient India. Here and there the old tribal organizations succeeded in adapting themselves to the changed conditions, and *gaṇas*, or tribal republics, survived for many centuries in outlying districts; but political divisions based on kinship were giving place to those based on

geography, and in many parts of India the tribes were rapidly breaking up. This, and the strong feeling of insecurity which it caused, may have been an important factor in the growth of asceticism and of a pessimistic outlook on the world, which is evident throughout this period.

If the popular assemblies had lost power, another element in the state was rising in influence—the *ratnins*, or "jewel bearers", the relatives, courtiers and palace officials of the king, who were looked on as so important that at the king's consecration special sacrifices were performed to ensure their loyalty. The list of ratnins includes the purohita, or chief priest of the palace, the general, the chamberlain, the king's charioteer, and various other influential palace servants. Two of the ratnins, the *saṃgrahitṛ* and *bhāgadugha*, have been explained as treasurer and revenue-collector respectively, but these interpretations are almost certainly false, and we have no clear evidence of a developed revenue system at this time.[17]

The period saw a great development of the sacrificial cult, which took place *pari passu* with rising royal pretensions. Much of the Brāhmaṇa literature is devoted to instructions for the meticulous performance of certain royal sacrifices not mentioned in the *Ṛg Veda*; among these were the lengthy *rājasūya*, or royal consecration, and the *vājapeya*, or "drink of strength", a sort of rejuvenation ceremony, which not only restored the vital forces of a middle-aged king, but raised him from the status of a simple rājā to that of a *saṃrāṭ*, a complete monarch free of all allegiance and with lesser kings subordinate to him. Most famous and significant of these sacrifices was the *aśvamedha*, or horse-sacrifice, wherein a specially consecrated horse was set free to roam at will for a year, followed by a chosen band of warriors. Chieftains and kings on whose territory the horse wandered were forced to do homage or fight, and if it was not captured by a neighbouring king it was brought back to the capital and sacrificed at the end of the year. It was the ambition of every important king to perform a horse-sacrifice, and the evil effects of the sacrifice on inter-state relations were felt to the end of the Hindu period.

By now the Āryans had nearly all the equipment of a civilization of the ancient type. Where the *Ṛg Veda* speaks only of gold and copper or bronze the later Vedic texts also mention tin, lead, silver and iron.* The importance of iron, harder and cheaper than bronze,

* "Black bronze" is referred to in the *Yajur Veda*, and a little iron has been discovered at an early level at Kauśāmbī, but no iron has been found in the remains of Hastināpura at this level. Recently iron has been found in very early levels at Atranjī Kherā (U.P.) and Pāndu Rājar Dhibī (Bengal). The view that iron was hardly known in India until the 6th century has now little to commend it.[18]

for clearing forests of hard tropical timber needs no stressing. Its introduction must have greatly accelerated the rate of Āryan expansion. The elephant was tamed, though little used in war. The Āryans now cultivated a large range of crops, including rice, and they understood something of irrigation and manuring.

Specialized trades and crafts had appeared. In place of the few craftsmen in the *Ṛg Veda* many are now referred to, including jewellers, goldsmiths, metal-workers, basketmakers, ropemakers, weavers, dyers, carpenters and potters. Various types of domestic servant are mentioned, and a rudimentary entertainment industry existed, with professional acrobats, fortune-tellers, flute-players and dancers, while there are also references to usurers and merchants.

Though Āryan culture had by now made great advances there is still no mention of coined money or writing, both of which were certainly used in India before the time of the Mauryas. Coinage may have been introduced towards the end of the 6th century B.C., through Persian influence, but it is doubtful whether we should accept the negative evidence of later Vedic literature to show that writing was wholly unknown, for this literature was intended for a limited audience of priests, who had developed a unique system of memory training, and who may well have looked on writing as an objectionable innovation. There is evidence in the literature itself of faint contacts with Mesopotamia, notably in the Indian flood legend (p. 304), which first appears at this time and which bears some similarity to that of Babylon. After a break of many centuries Indian merchandise was again finding its way to Mesopotamia, and it is possible that Semitic merchants, or Indian merchants returning from the West, brought an alphabetic system of writing, which was gradually taken up by the learned and adapted to the phonetics of Indian speech, to become the *Brāhmī* script of Mauryan times (p. 396f)

The most important developments of this age were religious, and will be considered elsewhere (p. 244ff). Culturally the period of the later Vedic literature saw Indian life and thought take the direction which it has followed ever since. The end of this shadowy age, with its kings growing in power, its priests arrogating to themselves ever greater privileges, and its religious outlook rapidly changing, marks the beginning of the great period of India's culture in which the pattern of her society, religion, literature and art gradually assumed something of its present shape.

III

HISTORY: ANCIENT AND MEDIEVAL EMPIRES

SOURCES OF HISTORY

At the courts of ancient Indian kings careful records were kept of the events of chief importance to the realm, but unfortunately these archives are completely lost to us. In the 12th century A.D. a Kashmīrī poet, Kalhaṇa, thought fit to write the history of his native land in verse, but his "River of Kings" (*Rājataraṅgiṇī*), although of great value for the study of the history of Kashmīr, has little to tell us about India as a whole, and there is no good evidence that similar chronicles were composed elsewhere. The Ceylon Chronicle (*Mahāvaṃsa*) is primarily a history of Buddhism in Ceylon, though it gives reliable information on political history. It is perhaps unjust to maintain that India had no sense of history whatever, but what interest she had in her own past was mainly concentrated on the fabulous kings of a legendary golden age, rather than on the great empires which had risen and fallen in historical times.

Thus our knowledge of the political history of ancient India is often tantalizingly vague and uncertain, and that of the medieval period, which we may take as beginning in the 7th century A.D., is often but little more precise. History must be pieced together from passing references in texts both religious and secular, from a few dramas and works of fiction purporting to describe historical events, from the records of foreign travellers, and from the many panegyrics or other references to reigning monarchs and their ancestors which have been found carved on rocks, pillars and temple walls, or incorporated as preambles to the title-deeds of land grants; the latter, fortunately for the historian, were usually engraved on copper plates (pl. XLVIII*b*). The early history of India resembles a jigsaw puzzle with many missing pieces; some parts of the picture are fairly clear; others may be reconstructed with the aid of a controlled imagination; but many gaps remain, and may never be filled. Few dates before the middle ages can be fixed with certainty, and the history of Hindu India, as far as we can reconstruct it, is almost completely lacking in the interesting anecdotes and vivid personalities which enliven the study of the past for professional and amateur historians alike. Moreover there is much disagreement among competent authorities on many important topics.

VII

RELIGION: CULTS, DOCTRINES AND METAPHYSICS

(1) THE RELIGION OF THE VEDAS

Gods of the Ṛg Veda

THE earliest civilized inhabitants of India worshipped a Mother Goddess and a horned fertility god; they had sacred trees and animals, and ritual ablutions apparently played an important part in their religious life. Beyond this much has been said and written about the religion of the Harappan people, but in the absence of intelligible texts any efforts at further defining it are very speculative. The salient features of Harappan religion appeared again in a new form at a much later date, and we must assume that it never died, but was quietly practised by the humbler people, gradually developing from contact with other doctrines and cults, until it gathered enough strength to reappear, and largely to overlay the old faith of the Āryan rulers of India.

We have much knowledge of the religion of the early Āryans from the 1028 hymns of the *Ṛg Veda*, which is the oldest religious text in the world still looked on as sacred, and which was probably composed between 1500 and 900 B.C. The *Ṛg Veda* is a collection of hymns for use at the sacrifices of the aristocratic Āryan cult. The three later Vedas, the *Sāma*, *Yajur* and *Atharva*, are of somewhat different character. The *Sāma Veda* is almost useless to the historian, being a collection of certain verses of the *Ṛg Veda* arranged for liturgical purposes. The *Yajur Veda*, compiled a century or two later than the *Ṛg Veda*, contains sacrificial formulæ in prose and verse to be pronounced by the *adhvaryu*, or priest who performed the manual part of the sacrifice. It exists in various recensions (*saṃhitā*), which are of two types, the "Black" giving the formulæ with rubricated instructions, and the "White" adding detailed instructions in a lengthy appendix called a *Brāhmaṇa*. The *Atharva Veda* consists mainly of magical spells and incantations in verse, and was certainly compiled after the *Ṛg* and *Yajur*. It possesses, however, an atmosphere of simple animism and sympathetic magic, and seems to reflect a lower cultural level than that of the *Ṛg Veda*, deriving from the plebeian religion of the Āryans and containing many non-Āryan

elements. The massive Brāhmaṇas, which are looked on as appendices to the Vedas, and the mystical *Āraṇyakas* and *Upaniṣads*, which are in turn appendices to the Brāhmaṇas, complete the literature generally known as Vedic. The material in the Brāhmaṇas looks back in the main to the period between c. 800 and 600 B.C., and the earliest Upaniṣads overlap with the latest Brāhmaṇas, though some Upaniṣads are certainly of much more recent date. The religion of the people who composed this literature was not that of later India, and many scholars refer to it as Brāhmaṇism or Vedism, to distinguish it from Hinduism, to which it bears a relation similar to that between the sacrificial Judaism of the temple and the later Judaism of the synagogue.

Much of the *Ṛg Veda* is imperfectly understood; the oldest exegetical work on it, the *Nirukta* (Etymology) of Yāska, perhaps dating from 500 B.C., shows that at a very early period the brāhmaṇs had forgotten the true meaning of many obsolete words. But the broad outlines of the religion of the *Ṛg Veda* are clear enough. The chief objects of worship were the *devas*, a word cognate with the Latin *deus*. The root from which this word is derived, *div*, is connected with brightness and radiance, and the devas by connotation were "the shining ones". The early gods of the Āryans, like those of the the Greeks, were chiefly connected with the sky and were predominantly male. A few goddesses occur in the *Ṛg Veda*; for instance *Pṛthvī*, a vague and rarely mentioned personification of the earth, *Aditi*, a mysterious and tenuous figure, the great mother of the gods, *Uṣas*, the goddess of the dawn, to whom a number of lovely hymns were addressed, *Rātrī*, the spirit of the night, who has a beautiful hymn to herself (p. 404), and *Araṇyānī*, the Lady of the Forest, a nature goddess of little importance who is praised in one very late hymn (p. 405); none of these, however, played a significant part in the cult.

At a remote period the ancestors of the Āryans, Iranians, Greeks, Romans, Germans, Slavs and Celts had similar, if not identical, beliefs; but by the time the Āryans had entered India their religion had developed far from the old Indo-European faith. The great father god of the Indo-European peoples, who appears in Greek as *Zeus* and in Latin as *Ju*-piter, was known to the Āryans as *Dyaus*, the personified heavens, but his star had already set. Father Heaven was often mentioned as the parent of other divinities, but few hymns were composed in his honour, and he was eclipsed by his children.

From the point of view of the Āryan warrior the greatest god was Indra, who fulfilled the dual function of war-god and weather-god. Though his name was different he had many of the characteristics of

the Greek Zeus and the Germanic Thor. As Indra *tonans* he rode at the head of the Āryan host and destroyed the fortresses of the Dāsas; as Indra *pluvius* he slew the evil dragon Vṛtra who held back the waters, and thus he brought rain to the parched land (p. 402ff). Indra was associated with storm and thunder, and, like Zeus and Thor, his hand bore the thunderbolt (*vajra*), with which he destroyed his enemies. He was a rowdy amoral deity, fond of feasting and drinking. One hymn, according to the usual interpretation, shows us the drunken Indra bragging in his cups, though it may well represent the feelings of a worshipper who has drunk liberally of the sacred drink *soma*:

"Like wild winds
the draughts have raised me up. Have I been drinking soma
"The draughts have borne me up,
as swift steeds a chariot. Have I . . . ?
"Frenzy has come upon me,
as a cow to her dear calf. Have I . . . ?
"As a carpenter bends the seat of a chariot
I bend this frenzy round my heart. Have I . . . ?
"Not even as a mote in my eye
do the five tribes count with me. Have I . . . ?
"The heavens above
do not equal one half of me. Have I . . . ?
"In my glory I have passed beyond the sky
and the great earth. Have I . . . ?
"I will pick up the earth,
and put it here or put it there. Have I . . . ?"[1]

With Indra in his course across the sky rode the bright host of *Maruts*, singing martial songs as they aided the war-god in his battles. They were the lesser spirits of the storm, conceived on the analogy of the host of Āryan warriors charging into battle beside their leader. The Āryans evidently had many legends in which Indra was the protagonist, but none of them can be reconstructed in detail from the cryptic allusions of the hymns. Two of Indra's traits connect him with Indo-European mythology, for they were applied to various gods and heroes throughout ancient Europe—he was a dragon-slayer (p. 402), and a wild rider of the storm. The former feature of his character may have been a very early borrowing from Mesopotamia.

Several gods were associated with the sun. *Sūrya* (the common word for sun) drove across the sky in a flaming chariot, like the Greek

Helios. *Savitṛ*, the Stimulator, was another solar god, a beautiful verse in whose honour is the most holy of all the verses of the Veda (p. 163). *Pūṣan* too was in some measure a solar god, driving daily across the sky, but his main function was that of guardian of roads, herdsmen and straying cattle. *Viṣṇu*, a god connected in part with the sacrifice, also had solar characteristics, covering the earth in three paces, a trait which he retained in later Hinduism, when his importance greatly increased. On the fringes of the solar pantheon was *Sūryā*, the sun-god's daughter, who seems never to have been worshipped, but merely served to connect her two husbands, the *Aśvins* ("Horsemen" also called *Nāsatyas*), with the sun; these are described as driving across the sky in their three-wheeled chariot, but in the hymns they are not closely associated with natural phenomena. They are twins—a fact which connects them with the Greek Dioscuri and twin gods of pre-Christian Baltic mythology. The Aśvins appear chiefly as helpers of men; among their many good deeds they are said to have rescued shipwrecked mariners, provided artificial legs for the maimed, and found husbands for old maids.

The fire-god, *Agni* (which means simply "fire", and is related to the Latin *ignis*), was the object of much primitive mysticism and speculation. He was the god of the priest, who dealt with him at the fire-sacrifice; he was also the god of the home, for he dwelt in the domestic hearth; he was the intermediary between gods and men, for he consumed the sacrifice and carried it to the gods. He dwelt in the waters of heaven in the form of lightning, and on earth in many forms. He was hidden in the fire-sticks, with which the sacrificial fire was kindled and which were personified as his parents. Agni, in fact, was here, there and everywhere. Was there only one Agni, or were there many Agnis? How could Agni be one and many at the same time? Questions like these are asked in the *Rg Veda*, and show the earliest signs of the tendency towards monism, which was to bear fruit in the Upaniṣads.

Soma was a divinity of special character. Soma was originally a plant, not certainly identified, from which a potent drink was produced, which was drunk only at sacrifices, and which caused the most invigorating effects, as we have seen from the hymn quoted above. The Zoroastrians of Persia had a similar drink, which they called *haoma*, the same word as soma in its Iranian form; the plant identified with *haoma* by the modern Pārsīs is a bitter herb, which has no specially inebriating qualities, and which is therefore not the soma of the Veda. The drink prepared from the plant can scarcely have been alcoholic, for it was made with great ceremony in the course of the sacrifice, when the herb was pressed between stones, mixed

with milk, strained and drunk on the same day. Sugar and honey, which produce fermentation, were not usually mixed with it, and the brief period between its brewing and consumption cannot have been long enough for the generation of alcohol in appreciable quantity. The effects of soma, with vivid hallucinations and the sense of expanding to enormous dimensions, are rather like those attributed to such drugs as hashish. Soma may well have been hemp, which grows wild in many parts of India, Central Asia and South Russia, and from which modern Indians produce a narcotic drink called *bhang*.

Like many ancient peoples the Indians connected the growth of plants with the moon, with which Soma, the king of plants, was later identified. So important was the god Soma considered by the ancient editors of the *Rg Veda* that they extracted all the hymns in his honour and placed them in a separate "book" (*maṇḍala*), the ninth of the ten which constitute the whole. He was the special god of the brāhmaṇs, who referred to him as their "king" or patron deity. He is sometimes even called the king of the gods, but by the ordinary Āryan it is doubtful if he was so highly esteemed.

Varuṇa, second only to Indra in importance, was a god of a type rather different from the others. He is known as an *Asura*, a term, also applied to certain lesser gods, which in later Hinduism came to mean a class of demons, but which was in Persia adopted by the reformer Zarathuštra in its local form as part of the title of the great god of light, Ahura Mazda. Just as the shadowy Dyaus represents the high god of the Indo-European peoples before their separation, so Varuṇa may have been the high god of the Indo-Iranians before the two peoples divided, one to settle in N.-W. India and the other in the Persian highlands. The name is connected by some authorities with the shadowy Greek heaven-god Uranus. At the time of the composition of the Veda, Varuṇa's prestige was waning before that of Indra, but he retained some importance for many centuries.

Varuṇa was first and foremost a king—not a boisterous tribal warlord like Indra, but a mighty emperor sitting in a great palace in the heavens, often with associated gods around him. Most important of these was *Mitra*, a god with some solar characteristics, but mainly connected with vows and compacts. Mitra was represented in the Zoroastrian pantheon, and, under his Greco-Iranian name Mithras, was widely worshipped in the Roman Empire in early Christian times. Around Varuṇa sat his scouts or spies (*spaś*), who flew all over the world and brought back reports on the conduct of mortals.

Varuṇa was the guardian of *Ṛta*, the cosmic order, a concept which was perhaps the highest flight of Ṛg Vedic thought. The world takes its regular course, day follows night and season succeeds season,

because of Ṛta; man must live according to Ṛta; in later days "non-ṛta" (*anṛta*) became one of the commonest words for untruth and sin. Ṛta depended on Varuṇa, who was sometimes looked on as its maker, and was thus a sort of creator-god.

Of all the Āryan gods Varuṇa was ethically the highest. He was always aware of the deeds of men, and was omnipresent, in the theistic as opposed to the pantheistic sense. Two men, even in the most secret of places or at the ends of the earth, cannot make plans alone—a third person, Varuṇa, is always there.[2] The worshipper approached Varuṇa in a spirit different from that in which he prayed to the other gods, most of whom were lively, cheerful fellows, whom men need not fear if they offered regular sacrifices. Varuṇa was so pure and holy that the mere performance of sacrifice would not ensure his favour, for he abhorred sin, or that which was not conformable to Ṛta. The idea of sin included many purely ritual sins and breaches of taboo, but it also certainly included lying, which Varuṇa and Mitra particularly loathed, and evil deeds prompted by anger, drink, gambling, and the influence of wicked men. When he sang to Varuṇa the cheerful Vedic poet often put on sackcloth and ashes, and prayed to his deity with fear and trembling, for Varuṇa was the severe punisher of sin. Not only did Varuṇa punish the sins of the individual but, like the Yahweh of the Old Testament, he visited the sins of his ancestors upon him, and his ubiquity ensured that there was no escape for the sinner. He caught and bound evil-doers in his snares, so that they became diseased, especially with dropsy, and when they died they descended to the "House of Clay", apparently a sort of gloomy subterranean Sheol, very different from the happy "World of the Fathers", the Āryan heaven.

So humble was the worshipper in Varuṇa's presence, so conscious of weakness, guilt and shortcoming, that on reading the hymns to Varuṇa one is inevitably reminded of the penitential psalms of the Old Testament. It has been suggested that Varuṇa owes much of his character to Semitic influence—certainly not to the Jews, for the penitential psalms were composed after the hymns to Varuṇa, and as far as we know the early Hebrews never came in contact with the Āryans, but perhaps to the Babylonians, who often approached their gods in a similar penitential spirit. We quote a typical hymn to Varuṇa; it is obviously the prayer of a man afflicted with dropsy.

"Let me not go to the House of Clay, O Varuṇa!
Forgive, O gracious Lord, forgive!
When I go tottering, like a blown-up bladder,
forgive, O gracious Lord, forgive!

"Holy One, in want of wisdom I have opposed you.
Forgive, O gracious Lord, forgive!
Though in the midst of waters, thirst has seized your worshipper.
Forgive, O gracious Lord, forgive!

"Whatever sin we mortals have committed
against the people of the gods,
if, foolish, we have thwarted your decrees,
O god, do not destroy us in your anger!"[3]

Yama, lord of the dead, was a sort of Adam, the first man to die, who became guardian of the World of the Fathers, where the blessed dead, those who have performed the rites of the Āryans, feast joyfully forever.

Rudra (perhaps meaning "the Howler"), like Varuṇa, had a dangerous side to his character, but, unlike Varuṇa, was quite amoral. He resembled the Greek Apollo in that he was an archer-god, whose arrows brought disease. Like Indra he was associated with the storm, but he lacked Indra's popular and genial character. He was a remote god, dwelling in the mountains, and was generally an object of fear, invoked to ward off his arrows of plague and disaster. He had, however, a beneficent aspect, for he was guardian of healing herbs, and as such might give health to those whom he capriciously favoured.

There were many other gods, such as *Tvaṣṭṛ*, the Vedic Vulcan, *Aryaman*, guardian of compacts and marriage, and *Vāyu*, the wind-god, who, though important, cannot be described here. There were also demigods of various kinds, among them *Viśvedevas*, a vague group of indeterminate deities, the *Maruts*, or storm-spirits, already mentioned, *Ṛbhus*, gnomes who worked in metal, *Gandharvas*, divine musicians, originally a single divinity but later looked on as many, and the lovely *Apsarases*, comparable to the nymphs of Greece, who might become the mistresses of gods and men.

No Homer or Hesiod attempted to construct a definitive genealogy of all these gods; their relationships are usually vague, and there is no tidy scheme of precedence among them. Each god must have had his own special devotees and priests, and the *Ṛg Veda* is the result of an imperfect syncretism of many tribal beliefs and cults. Already in the latest stratum of the Vedic hymns gods are equated or paired together, and there are doubts as to which god is really the greatest. In one hymn[4] this important question is asked as a refrain to every verse—"Whom, then, shall we honour with our oblations?"; later theologians were so puzzled by this that they decided that there was a god called *Ka* (Who?), to whom the hymn was addressed.

Sacrifice

The centre of the Āryan cult was sacrifice. The cult of the domestic hearth existed in many ancient Indo-European communities, and small domestic sacrifices, performed by the head of the house, must have been as important in the days of the *Ṛg Veda* as they were in later Hinduism, but the earliest texts describing them are the *Gṛhya Sūtras* (p. 118) of a much more recent period. The *Ṛg Veda* is rather concerned with great sacrifices, paid for by chiefs and wealthier tribesmen. They were already complex rites involving much preparation, the slaughter of numerous animals, and the participation of several well-trained priests.

The main purpose of the sacrifice was the gratification of the gods in order to obtain boons from them. The gods descended to the sacred straw (*barhis*) on the sacrificial field, drank and ate with the worshippers, and duly rewarded them with success in war, progeny, increase of cattle and long life, on a *quid pro quo* basis. The solemn Varuṇa and the grim and unpredictable Rudra are exceptional in the Vedic pantheon. Most of the gods were good natured. Guilt-offerings and thank-offerings, of the kind offered by the ancient Hebrews, are almost unheard of in the Veda.

Nevertheless the ceremony must have had its element of awe and wonder. The worshippers, inebriated with soma, saw wondrous visions of the gods; they experienced strange sensations of power; they could reach up and touch the heavens; they became immortal; they were gods themselves. The priests, who alone knew the rituals and formulae whereby the gods were brought to the sacrifice, were masters of a great mystery. With these ideas, which are explicitly stated in the hymns, went others less obvious. Often in the *Ṛg Veda* we read of a mysterious entity called *brahman*; in many contexts brahman is the magical power in the sacred utterance (*mantra*), but sometimes it has a wider connotation, and implies a sort of supernatural electricity, known to students of primitive religion as *mana*. The possessor of brahman, by a common process of secondary word formation in Sanskrit, became known as *brāhmaṇa*,* the tribal priest and magician. In later Vedic times the connection of brahman with speech became more and more pronounced, and the brāhmaṇ's magic was thought to lie in the words he uttered. The words and syllables of the Veda were analysed, and, though the texts were still unwritten, the letters of the alphabet were recognized and personified as eternal divinities. The metres used in the Veda were also thought of as gods. Later certain syllables were believed to be particularly holy,

* In this book usually written in its modern form *brāhman* to avoid confusion with the sacred texts of the same name.

notably *ŌM* (the *praṇava*), which contains the essence of the Vedas and is pregnant with the utmost power and mystery.

A second conception, which is hinted at in many hymns of the *Ṛg Veda*, and becomes prominent in the latest stratum, is also widely known in primitive religions—the mystical identification of god, victim and sacrificer. From these ideas the sacrifice obtained an even greater importance in the scheme of things than it had had at the time of the composition of the earlier parts of the *Ṛg Veda*. By the end of the period it was widely believed that the universe itself arose from a primeval sacrifice.

Though Varuṇa may sometimes have been looked on as a sort of creator, and there are suggestions of Indra's having fulfilled the same function (p. 402), there is no clearly defined creator-god in the main body of the *Ṛg Veda*. By the end of the Ṛg Vedic period, however, such a god had developed, whether wholly from the speculations of the brāhmaṇs or from non-Āryan influences. This god was *Prajāpati*, "the Lord of Beings", often identified with *Brahmā*, the masculine form of the neuter *brahman*. Prajāpati was thought of as a primeval man (*puruṣa*), who existed before the foundation of the universe. The man was sacrificed, presumably to himself, by the gods, who apparently were his children.* From the body of the divine victim the universe was produced. The "Hymn of the Primeval Man", in which this first cosmic sacrifice is described, bristles with obscurities, but its purport is quite clear.

"When the gods made a sacrifice
with the Man as their victim,
Spring was the melted butter, Summer the fuel,
and Autumn the oblation.

"From that all-embracing sacrifice
the clotted butter was collected.
From it he† made the animals
of air and wood and village.

"From that all-embracing sacrifice
were born the hymns and chants,
from that the metres were born,
from that the sacrificial spells were born.

"Thence were born horses,
and all beings with two rows of teeth.
Thence were born cattle,
and thence goats and sheep.

* In the Edda the god Wodan, in order to obtain magic power, is sacrificed by himself to himself.

† Presumably "the Man" Prajāpati himself, who survived his own dismemberment.

"When they divided the Man,
into how many parts did they divide him?
What was his mouth, what were his arms,
what were his thighs and his feet called?

"The brāhmaṇ was his mouth,
of his arms was made the warrior,
his thighs became the vaiśya,
of his feet the śūdra was born.

"The moon arose from his mind,
from his eye was born the sun,
from his mouth Indra and Agni,
from his breath the wind was born.

"From his navel came the air,
from his head there came the sky,
from his feet the earth, the four quarters from his ear,
thus they fashioned the worlds.

"With Sacrifice the gods sacrificed to Sacrifice—
these were the first of the sacred laws.
These mighty beings reached the sky,*
where are the eternal spirits, the gods."[5]

By this time a new attitude to the sacrifice had developed, and the rite had become a supernal mystery. By means of it the priests mystically repeated the primeval sacrifice, and the world was born anew. Without regular sacrifices all cosmic processes would cease, and chaos would come again. Thus the order of nature was on ultimate analysis not dependent on the gods at all, but on the brāhmaṇs, who by the magic of the sacrifice maintained and compelled them. The brāhmaṇ was more powerful than any earthly king or any god; by his accurate performance of sacrifice he maintained all things, and was therefore the supreme social servant; by the slightest variation of ritual he could turn the sacrifice against his patrons and destroy them, and was therefore the most dangerous of enemies.

This is the basic doctrine of the *Brāhmaṇas*, and it prevailed in many Āryan communities in North India from about 900 B.C. onwards, and left its mark on Hinduism in the exaltation of the brāhmaṇ. In this period many of the old gods of the *Ṛg Veda* lost their greatness, and became comparatively unimportant, while others rose in popularity, notably Viṣṇu and Rudra; the latter was already sometimes called by the epithet *Śiva*, "the Propitious", originally a deprecatory euphemism.

* It is not clear who are the mighty beings referred to. They are not the gods themselves, and the last verse may be a later addition.

New Developments of Doctrine

As Āryan culture pressed further down the Gangā it absorbed new ideas about the after-life. In the *Ṛg Veda* the fate of the dead seems to have been finally decided when they died—they went either to the "World of the Fathers" or to the "House of Clay", where they remained indefinitely. But in one late hymn[6] it is suggested in cryptic language that they might pass to the waters or remain in plants. This may be a reference to metempsychosis in the crude form believed in by many primitive peoples, according to which the souls of the dead pass to animals, plants or natural objects before being reborn in a human body. The *Brāhmaṇa* literature, which had lost the optimism of the *Ṛg Veda*, recognized the possibility of death even in heaven.

In the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*[7] the first form of the doctrine of transmigration is given. The souls of those who have lived lives of sacrifice, charity and austerity, after certain obscure peregrinations, pass to the World of the Fathers, the paradise of Yama; thence, after a period of bliss, they go to the moon; from the moon they go to empty space, whence they pass to the air, and descend to earth in the rain. There they "become food, . . . and are offered again in the altar fire which is man, to be born again in the fire of woman", while the unrighteous are reincarnated as worms, birds or insects. This doctrine, which seems to rest on a primitive belief that conception occurred through the eating by one of the parents of a fruit or vegetable containing the latent soul of the offspring, is put forward as a rare and new one, and was not universally held at the time of the composition of the Upaniṣad. Even in the days of the Buddha, transmigration may not have been believed in by everyone, but it seems to have gained ground very rapidly in the 7th and 6th centuries B.C. Thus the magnificently logical Indian doctrines of *saṃsāra*, or transmigration, and *karma*, the result of the deeds of one life affecting the next, had humble beginnings in a soul theory of quite primitive type; but even at this early period they had an ethical content, and had attained some degree of elaboration.

In whatever way the doctrine of transmigration was developed it involved belief in the repeated passage of the soul from life to life, either for all eternity or for an inestimably long time. It linked all forms of life into a single system. The gods themselves must pass away, and be replaced by other gods. As one Indra died, another was born. The souls of the departed, though now in bliss, would sooner or later pass to new abodes. Animals, insects, and according to some sects plants, all lived under the same law. With remarkable imaginative insight some sages taught that even water, dust and air were filled with minute animalculæ, and that these too had souls which were the same, in essence, as those of men. The whole of life thus passed through innumerable changes.

It was generally, though not universally, thought that these changes were determined by conduct. As one behaved in the present life so one's status in the scale of existence would in future be exalted or abased, and one's lot would be happy or wretched. This doctrine of *karma* (literally "deed") soon became fundamental to most Indian thought. It provided a satisfactory explanation of the mystery of suffering, which has troubled many thoughtful souls all over the world, and it justified the manifest social inequalities of the Āryan community.

To the ordinary man such a doctrine might not appear distasteful, and the fact that it quickly obtained almost universal acceptance shows that it met in great measure ancient India's spiritual needs. Indeed in many respects the idea of saṃsāra, which offers infinite potentialities of new experience to the soul, and which holds out hope even to the humblest of living things and the most evil of beings, might seem more attractive than the traditional static heaven and hell of the West. But to many earnest people the thought of transmigration was not pleasant. Death was always terrible, and the prospect of having to die innumerable times was not a happy one. Life, even when devoid of the major sorrows, was drab and inadequate, while continual rebirth seemed monotonously boring. The growth of the doctrine of transmigration coincided with the development of pessimistic ideas. Rebirth in heaven was not enough—a way had to be found to escape the cycle of birth and death altogether. It was found, to the satisfaction of the best minds of the times, in mystical knowledge, achieved by much meditation and asceticism.

Asceticism

In a late hymn of the *Ṛg Veda*[8] we read of a class of holy men different from the brāhmaṇs, the "silent ones" (*munis*), who wear the wind as a girdle, and who, drunk with their own silence, rise on the wind and fly in the paths of the demigods and birds. The muni knows all men's thoughts, for he has drunk of the magic cup of Rudra, which is poison to ordinary mortals. Another class of early ascetic, much mentioned in the *Atharva Veda*,[9] was the *vrātya*. This term, in its later broad meaning, implied an Āryan who had fallen from the faith and no longer respected the Vedas; but the vrātya of the *Atharva Veda* was a priest of a non-Vedic fertility cult, which involved ritual dancing and flagellation. He travelled from place to place in a cart, with a woman whom he prostituted, and a musician who performed

for him at his rites. The status and nature of the vrātyas are still not wholly clear, but it is evident that great efforts were made to convert them to the Āryan faith and to find room for them in the orthodox cult, and they were probably one of the chief sources of the new doctrines and practices.

By the time of the Upaniṣads asceticism had become very widespread, and it was through the ascetics, rather than the orthodox sacrificial priests, that the new teachings developed and spread. Some ascetics were solitary psychopaths, dwelling in the depths of the forests, and suffering self-inflicted tortures of hunger, thirst, heat, cold and rain. Others dwelt in "penance-grounds" on the outskirts of towns, where, like some of the less reputable holy-men of later times, they would indulge in fantastic self-torture, sitting near blazing fires in the hot sun, lying on beds of thorns or spikes, hanging for hours head downwards from the branches of trees, or holding their arms motionless above their heads until they atrophied.

Most of the new developments in thought, however, came from ascetics of less rigorous discipline, whose chief practices were the mental and spiritual exercises of meditation. Some of these dwelt alone on the outskirts of towns and villages, while others lived in huts, under the leadership of an elder. Others wandered, often in large groups, begging alms, proclaiming their doctrines to all who wished to listen, and disputing with their rivals. Some were completely naked, while others wore simple garments.

The original motive of Indian asceticism was the acquisition of magical power. The brāhmaṇs claimed this already, by virtue of their birth and training, but there were other types of power, obtainable by other means. By the time of the Upaniṣads faith in the cosmic mystery of the sacrifice had perhaps begun to wane, even among the brāhmaṇs themselves. Though sacrificial mysticism did not immediately disappear the rite once more came to be thought of as a means of obtaining prosperity, long life, and rebirth in heaven, rather than of sustaining the cosmos. Indeed the wealthy patrons of sacrifices had probably always had the former as their main motive. In the eastern parts of the Gangā Basin Brāhmaṇism was not so deeply entrenched as in the west, and older non-Āryan currents of belief flowed more strongly. The sacrificial cult did not wholly meet the needs of these lands, where firmly founded kingdoms were growing in power and material civilization was rapidly progressing.

The ascetic, even though his penance was of the most severe type, rose far above the heights achieved by the sacrificial priest. Once he had inured his body to pain and privation immeasurable joys awaited him. The hermit of the lower type had much to look forward to even on the material plane, in the form of honour and respect which as an ordinary man he could never hope for, and complete freedom from worldly cares and fears. This sense of freedom, of a great load lifted from one's shoulders by casting aside one's family and possessions, is evident in many passages of calm joy in the religious literature of India. But there were greater incentives to asceticism than these. As he advanced in his self-training the hermit acquired powers beyond those of ordinary mortals. He saw past, present and future; he mounted the heavens, and was graciously received at the courts of the gods, while divinities descended to earth and visited him in his hermitage. By the magical power acquired through his asceticism he could work miracles—he could crumble mountains into the sea; if offended, he could burn up his enemies with the glance of his eye, or cause the crops of a whole people to fail; if respected, his magical power could protect a great city, increase its wealth, and defend it from famine, pestilence and invasion. In fact the magic potency formerly ascribed to the sacrifice now began to be attributed to asceticism. In the succeeding age the idea that the universe was founded and maintained through sacrifice slipped into the background; in its place it was widely believed that the cosmos depended on the penances of the great god Śiva, meditating for ever in the fastnesses of the Himālayas, and on the continued austerities of his human followers.

If ascetism had its charms even for the less spiritual, they were still greater for the questing souls who took to a life of hardship from truly religious motives. As his mystical exercises developed his psychic faculties, the ascetic obtained insight which no words could express. Gradually plumbing the cosmic mystery, his soul entered realms far beyond the comparatively tawdry heavens where the great gods dwelt in light and splendour. Going "from darkness to darkness deeper yet" he solved the mystery beyond all mysteries; he understood, fully and finally, the nature of the universe and of himself, and he reached a realm of truth and bliss, beyond birth and death, joy and sorrow, good and evil. And with this transcendent knowledge came another realization—he was completely, utterly, free. He had found ultimate salvation, the final triumph of the soul. The ascetic who reached the goal of his quest was a conqueror above all conquerors. There was none greater than he in the whole universe.

The metaphysical interpretation of the ascetic's mystical knowledge varied from sect to sect, but the fundamental experience was the same, and, as has been many times pointed out, was not appreciably different from that of the Western saints and mystics, whether Greek,

Jewish, Christian or Muslim. But Indian mysticism is unique in its elaboration of techniques for inducing ecstasy, and in the complex metaphysical systems built upon interpretations of mystical experience. Where in other religions mysticism is of varying importance, in those of India it is fundamental.

The great development of asceticism and mysticism soon became too strong for the more earthbound and materialistic Brāhmaṇism to ignore. Places were found for the hermit and the wandering ascetic in the Āryan social structure by the formula of the four stages of life (p. 159f), which first appear in the Dharma Sūtras. Accounts of the discussions and teachings of some of the more orthodox of the early mystics were collected and added to the Brāhmaṇas as Āraṇyakas and Upaniṣads. A little later short treatises of mystical character were composed in verse, and also appended to the Brāhmaṇas as Upaniṣads. Later still a method of mystical training, often known as *yoga* ("union") (p. 327ff), was accepted as an orthodox element of the Hindu system. Indian religion had taken a new direction.

It has been suggested that the development of ascetic and mystical doctrines, especially in the heterodox systems of Buddhism and Jainism, represents a reaction of the warrior class to the pretensions of the brāhmaṇs and to the sterility of the sacrificial cult. This, however, is certainly not the whole truth. Buddha and Mahāvīra, the founder of Jainism, were kṣatriyas; they proclaimed the futility of sacrifice, and more than one passage in the Buddhist scriptures may be interpreted in an anti-brāhmaṇic sense. But many of the teachers of the new doctrines were themselves brāhmaṇs. The Upaniṣads, which represent the thought of the more orthodox mystics, in no way oppose sacrifice, but maintain its qualified validity; and passages speaking respectfully of brāhmaṇs are quite as frequent in the Buddhist scriptures as those which disparage them.

There was certainly some opposition to brāhmaṇic pretensions, and dissatisfaction with the sacrificial cult; but behind this, and the growth of pessimism, asceticism and mysticism, lay a deep psychological anxiety. The time of which we speak was one of great social change, when old tribal units were breaking up. The feeling of group solidarity which the tribe gave was removed, and men stood face to face with the world, with no refuge in their kinsmen. Chieftains were overthrown, their courts dispersed, their lands and tribesmen absorbed in the greater kingdoms. A new order was coming into being. "[Great heroes and mighty kings] have had to give up their glory; we have seen the deaths of [demigods and demons]; the oceans have dried up; mountains have crumbled; the Pole Star is

shaken; the Earth founders; the gods perish. I am like a frog in a dry well"; so speaks a king in one of the Upaniṣads.[10] Despite the great growth of material civilization at the time the hearts of many men were failing them for fear of what should come to pass upon earth. It is chiefly to this deep feeling of insecurity that we must attribute the growth of pessimism and asceticism in the middle centuries of the first millennium B.C.

Speculation and Gnosis

Asceticism was not merely a means of escape from an unhappy and unsatisfying world; it had a positive aspect, for it was in part inspired by a desire for knowledge, for the wisdom which the four Vedas could not give. Thus the growth of asceticism is not only a measure of the psychological uncertainty of the times, but also of their thirst for knowledge. It is not just to India to stigmatize her ancient wisdom as mere "life-negation".

All through the first millennium B.C. intelligent minds in India were striving for convincing explanations of the cosmic mystery. In the latest phase of the *Ṛg Veda* poets began to wonder about creation, which was not adequately explained by the current mythology. As we have seen, creation was thought of by some as the effect of a primeval sacrifice. It was also suggested that it was due to a sort of sexual act;[11] elsewhere the world was said to have originated in a "Golden Embryo" (*Hiraṇyagarbha*),[12] the prototype of the Cosmic Egg (p. 490) of later Hindu mythology. In one hymn the poet states that the world arose from warmth (*tapas*, later usually meaning penance or asceticism), and then rather regretfully admits that he is not sure of this hypothesis, and suggests that perhaps even the high god Prajāpati does not know the truth.

This wonderful "Hymn of Creation", one of the oldest surviving records of philosophic doubt in the history of the world, marks the development of a high stage of abstract thinking, and it is the work of a very great poet, whose vision of the mysterious chaos before creation, and of mighty ineffable forces working in the depths of the primeval void, is portrayed with impressive economy of language.

"Then even nothingness was not, nor existence.
There was no air then, nor the heavens beyond it.
What covered it? Where was it? In whose keeping?
Was there then cosmic water, in depths unfathomed?

"Then there were neither death nor immortality,
nor was there then the torch of night and day.
The One breathed windlessly and self-sustaining.
There was that One then, and there was no other.

"At first there was only darkness wrapped in darkness.
All this was only unillumined water.
That One which came to be, enclosed in nothing,
arose at last, born of the power of heat.

"In the beginning desire descended on it—
that was the primal seed, born of the mind.
The sages who have searched their hearts with wisdom
know that which is is kin to that which is not.

"And they have stretched their cord across the void,
and know what was above, and what below.*
Seminal powers made fertile mighty forces.
Below was strength, and over it was impulse.

"But, after all, who knows, and who can say
whence it all came, and how creation happened?
The gods themselves are later than creation,
so who knows truly whence it has arisen?

"Whence all creation had its origin,
he, whether he fashioned it or whether he did not,
he, who surveys it all from highest heaven,
he knows—or maybe even he does not know."[13]

In the centuries succeeding the composition of the *Ṛg Veda*, however, speculation was mainly concerned with the symbolism of the sacrifice.

"Dawn is the head of the sacrificial horse, the sun its eye, the wind its breath, fire its mouth; the year is the body of the sacrificial horse, heaven its back, the sky its belly, earth its chest, the four quarters its sides . . . the seasons its limbs, the months and fortnights its joints; days and nights are its feet, the stars its bones, the heavens its flesh. Its half-digested food is sand, its bowels the rivers, its liver and lungs the mountains, its hair plants and trees. When the sun rises it is the horse's fore-quarters, when it sets it is its hind-quarters. When the horse shakes itself it lightens; when it kicks, it thunders; when it makes water, it rains. Sound is its voice."[14]

The symbolism of the sacrifice was carried much further than this. Every word or action of the ritual was identified with some aspect of the cosmos. The intellectual ingenuity spent on this process of finding *pratīkas* or symbols must have been considerable, but it was largely sterile. Yet the questing spirit of the "Hymn of Creation" never wholly disappeared, and in the 6th century B.C. it bore fruit in a great wave of thought which was to alter the whole religious life of India.

* My translation of this obscure verse is very free.

The early Upaniṣads and the scriptures of Buddhism and Jainism, all of which look back to the 7th or 6th centuries B.C. (though the latter were much later in their final composition), show that there existed a bewildering variety of speculations and theories on the origin of the universe, the nature of the soul, and kindred problems. Some of these were accepted by one or other brāhmaṇic school and incorporated into orthodox belief. Others were the germinal bases of heterodox sects, two of which survive to this day, but most of which have long since vanished, and are only remembered in passing references in the scriptures of their opponents.

Among the more orthodox teachings we find creation ascribed to the self-consciousness of the primeval Person (*Puruṣa*, i.e. Prajāpati), who felt fear, loneliness, and the need of companionship. The Person divided himself, and produced a wife. This couple, taking the forms of animals and men, created the whole universe.[15] The idea of creation by a cosmic sexual act was one which played a great part in later religious thought. The theme is repeated in various forms in later Vedic literature, in some of which *tapas*—the power derived from asceticism—is an essential feature in the process of creation—a significant shifting of emphasis from the older theory that the world depended on a primeval sacrifice.

Other more heterodox teachers put forward naturalistic and atheistic cosmogonic theories. Some believed that the world began as water; others postulated fire, wind, or ether (*ākāśa*, p. 499) as the ultimate basis of the universe. For some the universe was based neither on a deity nor even on an impersonal entity, but on a principle —fate (*niyati*), time (*kāla*), nature (*svabhāva*), or chance (*saṃgati*). It was suggested that the world developed not by the intervention of god or forces external to it, but by a process of internal evolution or "ripening" (*pariṇāma*). Some teachers, like the Buddha, taught that speculation on first causes was a futile waste of time. There were out-and-out pyrrhonists, denying the possibility of any certain knowledge at all, and materialists, who rejected the existence of the soul and all other immaterial entities, while some teachers proclaimed that the world was made of eternal atoms. The intellectual life of India in the 7th and 6th centuries B.C. was as vigorous and pullulating as the jungle after rains.

The propagators of these doctrines, even of materialism and scepticism, were nearly all ascetics, though the literature of the time mentions more than one king who took a keen interest in the new ideas. Chief of these philosopher kings were Janaka of Videha and

Ajātaśatru of Kāśi (Vārāṇasī), both of whom probably lived in the 7th century B.C. The forest hermits (*vānaprastha*) seem to have departed less far from Vedic orthodoxy than the wanderers (*parivrājaka*), who maintained a bewildering variety of doctrines. It was chiefly among the former that the literature of the Upaniṣads developed.

The term Upaniṣad means literally "a session", sitting at the feet of a master who imparts esoteric doctrines. There are said to be 108 Upaniṣads altogether, but many of these are late sectarian works of little importance. The earlier Upaniṣads, like the great *Bṛhad-āraṇyaka* and the *Chāndogya*, are in prose and consist of a series of short expositions of some aspect of the new doctrines, often in the form of question and answer. The Upaniṣads of somewhat later composition, like the *Kaṭha* and the *Śvetāśvatara*, are in verse, and their contents are more closely integrated. Though the speculations of the Upaniṣads differ very considerably, their main purport is the same. One entity, often called *Brahman*, the term used in the *Ṛg Veda* to mean the magic of the sacred word (p. 241), fills all space and time. This is the ground beyond and below all forms and phenomena, and from it the whole Universe, including the gods themselves, has emerged.

The great and saving knowledge which the Upaniṣads claim to impart lies not in the mere recognition of the existence of Brahman, but in continual consciousness of it. For Brahman resides in the human soul—indeed Brahman *is* the human soul, is *Ātman*, the Self. When a man realizes this fact fully he is wholly freed from transmigration. His soul becomes one with Brahman, and he transcends joy and sorrow, life and death. In sleep a man's spirit is set free; it wanders through the universe as a bird or a god, it becomes a king or a brāhmaṇ. Beyond dreaming is dreamless sleep, where the soul's experiences are such that they cannot be expressed; and beyond this again is Brahman. When he reaches Brahman, man is free.

In their struggle to express the inexpressible the sages of the Upaniṣads used imagery of every kind. Sometimes the idea of the soul is rather primitive, and it is described as a tiny manikin in the heart; sometimes it is said to be the breath, or a mysterious fluid which flows in the veins; but sometimes it is thought of as quite incorporeal and immeasurable:

"'Fetch me a fruit of the banyan tree.'
"'Here is one, sir.'
"'Break it.'
"'I have broken it, sir.'
"'What do you see?'
"'Very tiny seeds, sir.

"'Break one.'
"'I have broken it, sir.'
"'Now what do you see?'
"'Nothing, sir.'
"'My son,' the father said, 'what you do not perceive is the essence, and in that essence the mighty banyan tree exists. Believe me, my son, in that essence is the Self of all that is. That is the True, that is the Self. And you are that Self, Śvetaketu!'"[16]

Here the soul is the inmost self of the being, in no sense material, though ideas of a sort of soul-stuff, a subtle matter of which the soul was composed, persisted, especially among the Jainas. The term *Ātman* came to mean indiscriminately "soul" and "self", which lends a certain ambiguity to many passages in the Hindu scriptures.

The identity of the souls of the individual and the universe is reiterated throughout the Upaniṣadic literature, with varying emphasis, and with differing interpretations of the nature of the identity and the character of the universal soul. *Tat tvam asi*, "you (the individual) are that (universal essence)", the words of the father to the son in the passage we have quoted, is the leading theme of the Upaniṣads. The one eternal undifferentiated essence, above good and evil, is in a condition of consciousness which is beyond deep sleep (*suṣupti*), but is yet awake and living. Though it fills the whole of space, by a mysterious verity which defies logic but is proved by experience it dwells in the core of the human heart. It is generally thought of as uniform and impersonal, and the word Brahman is of neuter gender. Thus all the multifariousness and incoherence of the universe is explained away, and reduced to a single entity.

"'Put this salt in water, and come to me in the morning.'
"The son did as he was told. The father said: 'Fetch the salt.' The son looked for it, but could not find it, because it had dissolved.
"'Taste the water from the top,' said the father. 'How does it taste?'
"'Of salt,' the son replied.
"'Taste from the middle. How does it taste?'
"'Of salt,' the son replied.
"'Taste from the bottom. How does it taste?'
"'Of salt,' the son replied.
"Then the father said: 'You don't perceive that the one Reality (*sat*) exists in your own body, my son, but it is truly there. Everything which is has its being in that subtle essence. That is Reality! That is the Soul! And you are that, Śvetaketu!'"[17]

The Universal Essence is sometimes defined in purely negative terms. "The Self can only be described as 'Not this, not this'. It

is incomprehensible, imperishable, . . . unattached, . . . unfettered, . . . it does not suffer, . . . it does not fail."[18] But, despite the negations of this passage, the sage Yājñavalkya, to whom it is attributed, could not escape giving the Universal Essence a degree of personality, and in one place almost identified it with the High God.

"That great unborn Self, comprised of knowledge, is . . . the ether in the heart. In that is the ruler and lord, the king of all things. He grows no greater by good deeds, nor smaller by evil deeds, but he is the lord of all things, the king of all things, the protector of all things."[19]

In the verse Upaniṣads the World Spirit is described rather as a god than as a cosmic essence.

"He encircles all things, radiant and bodyless,
unharmed, and untouched by evil,
All-seeing, all-wise, all-present, self-existent,
he has made all things well for ever and ever."[20]

In the Upaniṣad from which this is taken the World Spirit is referred to as *Iśa*, "the Lord". The *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* calls the Spirit "the Person" (*Puruṣa*), reminding us of the divine victim of the primeval sacrifice from which the world was born. In one passage the World Spirit is mentioned with fear and dread, recalling that earlier felt for the god Varuṇa:

"All things whatever, the whole world,
produced [from Brahman] tremble in its breath.
It is a great terror, an upraised thunderbolt.
They who know this become immortal.

"From terror [of Brahman] the Fire burns.
From terror [of Brahman] the Sun shines.
From fear of Brahman Indra, and the Wind,
and Death as the fifth all run away."[21]

The *Śvetāśvatara Upaniṣad*, which is later than those previously mentioned, describes the World Spirit in completely theistic terms. It is no longer an impersonal essence, but a creator god—in fact the god Rudra, or Śiva. Rudra may be reached not only by meditation and penance, but also by devotion and worship.

"The snarer, who rules alone in his might,
he who governs the world in his power,
is always one and the same,
though all else rise and decay. . . .

"There is one, Rudra alone, . . .
who rules the world in his might.
He stands behind all beings, he made all the worlds,
and protects them, and rolls them up at the end of time.

"The Lord lives in the faces of all beings,
in their heads, in their necks.
He lives in the inmost heart of all,
the all-pervading, all-present Śiva."[22]

This brings us very near to the religious atmosphere of the *Bhagavad Gītā*, the most exalted and beautiful of India's religious poems, which teaches a fully-fledged theism and is part of the more recent Hinduism rather than of the old Brāhmaṇism, which slowly changed from a religion of sacrifice to one of devotion.

Ethics of the Upaniṣads

In general the Upaniṣads proclaim salvation by knowledge or realization rather than by faith or works. Their ethics are fundamentally pragmatic. Good and evil are resolved in the all-pervading Brahman, and are relative terms only. From the point of view of the seeker after truth, that is good which leads him to the realization of Brahman, and evil the reverse. Thus anything which discourages the meditative life is ultimately bad, and among the most serious of these obstacles are selfish desires. In more than one context it is said that the universe came into existence through a primeval desire of the World Soul; to attain bliss the hermit must, so to speak, restore the state of things before creation. The normal values of the world, sacrifice, benevolence, and even asceticism, are only good in so far as they lead the soul upwards.

"There are three branches of the Law. Sacrifice, study and charity are the first, austerity is the second, and to dwell in celibacy in the house of one's teacher . . . is the third. By all these one only reaches the worlds of the blessed, but the man who is fixed in Brahman finds immortality."[23]

"The wise men of old did not want children. 'What should we do with children,' they said, 'when we have Brahman and the world besides?' And they conquered their desire for sons and wealth and the heavenly worlds, and wandered about as beggars. . . . He who knows [the mystery of Brahman] becomes calm, restrained, satisfied, patient and confident, and he sees himself in the [Great] Self, sees all things as the Self. . . . Evil does not overcome him, but he overcomes evil. . . . Free from evil, free from decay, free from hatred, free from thirst, he becomes a [true] brāhmaṇ."[24]

Occasionally it is suggested, especially in the later Upaniṣads, that all desires whatever are incompatible with the saving knowledge.

"When all desires which cling to the heart
fall away
then the mortal becomes immortal,
and in this life finds Brahman.

"When all the earthly ties of the heart
are sundered,
then the mortal becomes immortal.
This is the end of all instruction."[25]

A life of ascetism was not absolutely necessary to salvation—even kings are said to have realized Brahman while still ruling—but the saving knowledge was at best very hard to obtain, and doubly difficult for one whose mind was full of material cares and desires. All pleasure was therefore suspect.

"The good is one thing and the pleasant another.
Both, with their different ends, control a man.
But it is well with him who chooses the good,
while he who chooses the pleasant misses his mark."[26]

Though often rather negative, the ethical attitude of the Upaniṣads is neither unmoral nor antinomian. He who has not ceased from evil conduct will never obtain Brahman. Here and there are passages of high ethical value among the reiterated mystical similes and parables of the texts. Thus honesty is highly extolled.

"Satyakāma son of Jabālā said to his mother: 'Mother, I want to be a student. What is my family?'

"'I don't know your family, my dear,' she said. 'I had you in my youth, when I travelled about a lot as a servant—and I just don't know! My name is Jabālā, and yours is Satyakāma, so say you are Satyakāma Jābāla.' *

"He went to Gautama Hāridrumata, and said: 'I want to be your student, sir. May I come?'

"'What is your family, my friend?' he asked.

"'I don't know my family, sir,' he answered. 'I asked my mother, and she said that she had me in her youth, when she used to travel about a lot as a servant. . . . She said that as she was Jabālā and I was Satyakāma I was to give my name as Satyakāma Jābāla.'

"'Nobody but a true brāhmaṇ would be so honest!' he said. . . . 'Go and fetch me fuel, my friend, and I will initiate you, for you have not swerved from the truth.'"[27]

A further fine ethical passage occurs in the form of a legend in the *Bṛhadāraṇyaka Upaniṣad*. We quote this passage partly because an allusion to it must have puzzled many readers of T. S. Eliot.[28]

* A patronymic, which would give the impression that the boy was the son of a man named Jabāla.

"The threefold descendants of Prajāpati, gods, men and demons, were once students at the feet of their father. When they had finished their training the gods said: 'Sir, tell us something [good for our souls]'. He uttered the syllable DA, and then asked them whether they had understood.

"'We understood', they answered. 'You told us *DAmyata* (be self-controlled).' 'Yes,' he said, 'you understood indeed!'

"Then the men asked him, and he uttered the same syllable DA, and then asked them whether they had understood. 'We understood,' they answered. 'You told us *DAtta* (give).' 'Yes,' he said, 'you understood indeed!'

"Then the demons asked him, . . . and he uttered the same syllable DA, and then asked them whether they had understood. 'We understood,' they answered. 'You told us *DAyadhvam* (be merciful).' 'Yes,' he said, 'you understood indeed!'

"And the blessed voice of the thunder ever repeats DA DA DA *—be self-controlled, give, be merciful. So these three should ever be taught —self-control, charity and mercy."[29]

Perhaps the highest ethical flight of the Upaniṣads occurs in the instructions said to have been given by Yājñavalkya to his favourite wife before taking up the life of an ascetic. Remembering the double meaning of the word *ātman*, "self" or "soul", the passage may be read in two ways, but the context shows that the Higher Self is intended. This Higher Self, the World Soul, the mystic recognizes in all things, and loves them for their participation with himself in the unity of the spirit. The passage is too long to quote in full, but we paraphrase its most important parts.

"Yājñavalkya had two wives, Maitreyī and Kātyāyanī. Maitreyī knew something of the World Soul, but Kātyāyanī only knew what every woman knows. When he wished to enter on another phase of life Yājñavalkya said: 'Maitreyī, I am leaving home. Let me make a settlement on you and Kātyāyanī.'

"Maitreyī asked: 'My lord, if I owned the whole earth and all its wealth, should I be immortal?'

"'No,' Yājñavalkya replied, 'your life would be the life of the wealthy, and there is no prospect of immortality in wealth.'

"Maitreyī said: 'Of what use to me are things which will not give me immortality? Give me rather your knowledge, my lord.'

"'Lady,' he replied, 'you are truly dear to me, and now you are even dearer. So if you like I will teach you. Listen carefully!

"'A husband is not dear for love of the husband—a husband is dear for love of the Self. Similarly wife, sons, wealth, cattle, priests and warriors, worlds, gods, the Vedas, everything—none of them are dear in their own right, but all are dear for love of the Self.

"'Truly you can see and hear and perceive and know the Self, Maitreyī.

* A traditional onomatopœic expression of the sound of thunder.

And when you have seen, heard, perceived and known the Self you will know all things.

"'Where there seems to be a duality of self and not-self one sees, smells, tastes, perceives, hears, touches and knows something other. But when all is the Self there is no consciousness of anything other than Self. . . . Thus Maitreyī I have instructed you—this is immortality!'

"When he had said this Yājñavalkya went away."[30]

(II) BUDDHISM

The Buddha

While the doctrines of the Upaniṣads found a place in the brāhmaṇic system, there were other teachings which could not be harmonized with orthodoxy, but were fostered and developed by heterodox sects. Chief among the teachers of such doctrines was the man who at the end of the sixth and the beginning of the fifth century B.C. established a community of yellow-robed followers, and was known by them as the *Buddha*, the Enlightened or Awakened. Even if judged only by his posthumous effects on the world at large he was certainly the greatest man to have been born in India.

The traditional story of the Buddha, like those of most saints and heroes of ancient days, has suffered much at the hands of higher criticism. The story of his birth and early life appears only in the later books of the Buddhist Scriptures, and many of the references to him in those parts of the canon which purport to give his teachings verbatim are by no means reliable. Even the "Sermon of the Turning of the Wheel of the Law", which is said to be the first sermon preached after the Buddha's enlightenment, and which is the basic teaching of all Buddhist sects, is of dubious authenticity, and in the form in which we have it is not among the earliest parts of the canon. Much doubt now exists as to the real doctrines of the historical Buddha, as distinct from those of Buddhism. One eminent authority suggested that they differed but little from the teachings of the Upaniṣadic sages,[31] while another held that he rejected the doctrine of transmigration, and taught merely the almost self-evident truism that one generation is affected by the deeds of the preceding one.[32] We here discuss, however, not the life of the Buddha, but what his later followers believed about his life, and not what he taught, but what Buddhism taught.

Certain facts about the Buddha's life are reasonably certain. He was the son of a chief of the Śākyas, a small tribe of the Nepalese Terai. He became an ascetic, and propounded a new doctrine which gained the support of numerous disciples. After many years

of teaching in the kingdoms of Kosala and Magadha and in the tribal lands to the north of the Gangā, he died at the age of eighty at some time between the years 486 and 478 B.C., probably nearer the former date than the latter. The story of his life as told by his followers is far more vivid and colourful than this dry outline, and it is infinitely more important, for it has influenced countless millions throughout the whole of Asia east of Afghānistān.

One night Mahāmāyā,* chief queen of Śuddhodhana, king of the Śākyas, dreamt that she was carried away to the divine lake Anavatapta in the Himālayas, where she was bathed by the heavenly guardians of the four quarters of the universe. A great white elephant holding a lotus flower in his trunk approached her, and entered her side (pl. XV*c*). Next day the dream was interpreted for her by wise men—she had conceived a wonderful son, who would be either a Universal Emperor (p. 84f) or a Universal Teacher. The child was born in a grove of sāl trees called Lumbinī, near the capital of the Śākyas, Kapilavastu, while his mother was on the way to her parents' home for her confinement. At birth he stood upright, took seven strides, and spoke: "This is my last birth—henceforth there is no more birth for me."

The boy was named Siddhārtha, at a great ceremony on the fifth day from his birth. His *gotra* name was Gautama (in Pāli, Gotama) by which he is commonly referred to in Buddhist literature. The soothsayers prophesied that he would become a Universal Emperor, with the exception of one, who declared that four signs would convince him of the misery of the world, and he would become a Universal Teacher. To prevent this prophecy coming true King Śuddhodhana resolved that he should never know the sorrows of the world. He was reared in delightful palaces, from whose parks every sign of death, disease and misery was removed. He learned all the arts that a prince should learn, and excelled as a student. He married his cousin Yaśodharā, whom he won at a great contest at which he performed feats of strength and skill which put to shame all other contestants, including his envious cousin Devadatta.

But for all his prosperity and success he was not inwardly happy, and for all the efforts of his father he did see the four signs foretold, which were to decide his career, for the gods knew his destiny, and it was they who placed the signs before him. One day, as he was driving round the royal park with his faithful charioteer Channa, he saw an aged man, in the last stages of infirmity and decrepitude—actually a god, who had taken this disguise in order that Siddhārtha Gautama might become a Buddha. Siddhārtha asked Channa who this repulsive being was, and when he learned that all men must grow old he was even more troubled in mind. This was the first sign. The second came a little later, in the same way, in the

* Throughout this section and generally in this book we employ Sanskrit forms of Buddhist names and terms, for the sake of consistency. The reader who goes on to more detailed study may meet them in their Pāli forms, as used by the Sthaviravāda Buddhists.

form of a very sick man, covered with boils and shivering with fever. The third was even more terrible—a corpse, being carried to the cremation-ground, followed by weeping mourners. But the fourth sign brought hope and consolation—a wandering religious beggar, clad in a simple yellow robe, peaceful and calm, with a mien of inward joy. On seeing him Siddhārtha realized where his destiny lay, and set his heart on becoming a wanderer.

Hearing of this King Suddhodhana doubled his precautions. Siddhārtha was made a virtual prisoner, though still surrounded with pleasures and luxuries of all kinds; his heart knew no peace, and he could never forget the four signs. One morning the news was brought to him that Yaśodharā had given birth to a son, but it gave him no pleasure. That night there were great festivities, but when all were sleeping he roused Channa, who saddled his favourite horse Kaṇṭhaka, and he rode off into the night, surrounded by rejoicing demigods, who cushioned the fall of his horse's hoofs so that no one should hear his departure (p. 455, and pl. XXIV*c*).

When far from the city he stripped off his jewellery and fine garments, and put on a hermit's robe, provided by an attendant demigod. With his sword he cut off his flowing hair, and sent it back to his father with his garments by the hand of Channa. The horse Kaṇṭhaka dropped dead from grief when he found that he was to be parted from his master, and was reborn in one of the heavens. Thus Siddhārtha performed his "Great Going Forth" (*Mahābhiniṣkramaṇa*) and became a wandering ascetic, owning nothing but the robe he wore.

At first he begged his food as a wanderer, but he soon gave up this life for that of a forest hermit. From a sage named Ālāra Kālāma he learned the technique of meditation, and the lore of Brahman as taught in the Upaniṣads; but he was not convinced that man could obtain liberation from sorrow by mental discipline and knowledge, so he joined forces with five ascetics who were practising the most rigorous self-mortification in the hope of wearing away their karma and obtaining final bliss.

His penances became so severe that the five quickly recognized him as their leader. For six years he tortured himself until he was nothing but a walking skeleton. One day, worn out by penance and hunger, he fainted, and his followers believed that he was dead. But after a while he recovered consciousness, and realized that his fasts and penances had been useless. He again began to beg food, and his body regained its strength. The five disciples left him in disgust at his backsliding.

One day Siddhārtha Gautama, now thirty-five years old, was seated beneath a large pīpal tree on the outskirts of the town of Gayā, in the realm of Bimbisāra king of Magadha. Sujātā, the daughter of a nearby farmer, brought him a large bowl of rice boiled in milk. After eating some of this he bathed, and that evening, again sitting beneath the pīpal tree, he made a solemn vow that, though his bones wasted away and his blood dried up, he would not leave his seat until the riddle of suffering was solved.

So for forty-nine days he sat beneath the tree. At first he was surrounded by hosts of gods and spirits, awaiting the great moment of enlightenment;

but they soon fled, for Māra, the spirit of the world and of sensual pleasure, the Buddhist devil, approached. For days Gautama withstood temptations of all kinds (pl. XIX). Māra, disguised as a messenger, brought news that the wicked cousin Devadatta had revolted, thrown Suddhodhana into prison, and seized Yaśodharā, but Gautama was not moved. Māra called his demon hosts, and attacked him with whirlwind, tempest, flood and earthquake, but he sat firm, cross-legged beneath the tree. Then the tempter called on Gautama to produce evidence of his goodness and benevolence; he touched the ground with his hand, and the Earth itself spoke with a voice of thunder: "I am his witness".

Māra then tried gentler means of shaking Gautama's resolve. He called his three beautiful daughters, Desire, Pleasure and Passion, who danced and sang before him, and tried every means of seduction. Their wiles were quite ineffectual. They offered him Universal Empire; but he was unmoved.

At last the demon hosts gave up the struggle and Gautama, left alone, sank deeper and deeper into meditation. At the dawning of the forty-ninth day he knew the truth. He had found the secret of sorrow, and understood at last why the world is full of suffering and unhappiness of all kinds, and what man must do to overcome them. He was fully enlightened—a Buddha. For another seven weeks he remained under the Tree of Wisdom (*bodhi*), meditating on the great truths he had found.

For a time he doubted whether he should proclaim his wisdom to the world, as it was so recondite and difficult to express that few would understand it; but the god Brahmā himself descended from heaven and persuaded him to teach the world. Leaving the Tree of Wisdom, he journeyed to the Deer Park near Vārāṇasī (the modern Sārnāth), where his five former disciples had settled to continue their penances.

To these five ascetics the Buddha preached his first sermon, or, in Buddhist phraseology, "set in motion the Wheel of the Law". The five were so impressed with his new doctrine that they gave up their austerities and once more became his disciples. A few days later a band of sixty young ascetics became his followers, and he sent them out in all directions to preach the Buddhist Dharma. Soon his name was well known throughout the Gangā Plain, and the greatest kings of the time favoured him and his followers. He gathered together a disciplined body of monks (called *bhikṣus*, or in Pāli *bhikkhus*, literally "beggars"), knit together by a common garb, the yellow robes of the order, and a common discipline, according to tradition laid down in detail by the Buddha himself. Many stories are told of his long years of preaching. He returned to Kapilavastu, and converted his father, wife and son Rāhula, as well as many other members of the court, including his cousin Devadatta, whose heart remained full of jealousy. At the request of his foster-mother and aunt, Kṛṣā-Gautamī, he allowed with much misgiving the formation of a community of nuns. Devadatta grew so jealous of him that once he even tried to kill the Buddha, by arranging for a mad elephant to be let loose in his path; but the beast, impressed by the Buddha's gentleness and fearlessness, calmly bowed at his feet (pl. XXIV*a*). He averted a war between the Śākyas and the Koliyas, by walking between

the assembled armies and convincing them of the uselessness and evil of bloodshed. He went alone to the camp of a notorious bandit, Aṅgulimāla, and converted him and his followers from their evil ways.

Though according to legend his life was attended by many wonders, the earliest traditions record few miracles accomplished by the Buddha himself. Once he is said to have performed feats of levitation and other miracles at Śrāvastī, as a result of a challenge from rival teachers, but he sternly forbade the monks to imitate him, and there is no record of his healing the sick by supernatural means. One touching story of the Buddha is interesting in this connexion, since it contrasts strikingly with the Gospel stories of the miracles of Jesus. A woman, stricken with grief at the death of her only son, and hearing that the Buddha was in the vicinity, brought the child's corpse to him in the hope that he would restore it to life. He asked her first to go to the nearby town and bring a handful of mustard seed from a family in which no one had died. She went from house to house, but of course could find no such family, until at last she understood the inevitability of death and sorrow, and became a nun.

For eight months of the year the Buddha and his followers would travel from place to place, preaching to all and sundry. For the four months of the rainy season, roughly corresponding to the English summer, they would stop in one of the parks given to the Buddhist order by wealthy lay followers, living in huts of bamboo and reed—the first form of the great Buddhist monasteries of later times. For over forty years his reputation grew and the *Saṅgha* (literally Society, the Buddhist Order) increased in numbers and influence. With the exception of the conspiracy of Devadatta he suffered no persecution, though a few of his followers were maltreated by their religious opponents. His ministry was a long, calm and peaceful one, in this respect very different from that of Jesus.

The end came at the age of eighty. He spent the last rainy season of his life near the city of Vaiśālī, and after the rains he and his followers journeyed northwards towards the country which had been the home of his youth. On the way he prepared his disciples for his death. He told them that his body was now like a worn-out cart, creaking at every joint. He declared that he had made no distinction between esoteric and exoteric teaching, but had preached the full doctrine to them.* When he was gone they were to look for no new leader—the Doctrine (*Dharma*) which he had preached would lead them. They must rely on themselves, be their own lamps, and look for no refuge outside themselves.

At the town of Pāvā he was entertained by a lay disciple, Cunda the smith, and ate a meal of pork.† Soon after this he was attacked by dysentery, but

* We cannot, of course, rely on the verbatim accuracy of the account of the Buddha's death, and this passage[33] may be an interpolation directed against early heterodox schools which claimed to possess secret teachings of the Buddha. It is equally possible, however, that it refers to the teachers of the Upaniṣads, who kept their most secret doctrines for their closest disciples.

† Most modern Buddhists claim that the last meal was of truffles, and the Pāli phrase *sūkara-maddava*, "sweetness of pigs", is certainly ambiguous.[34] But early commentators took it to mean a choice cut of pork.[35]

he insisted on moving on to the nearby town of Kuśinagara (Pāli, Kusinārā). Here, on the outskirts of the town, he lay down under a sāl tree, and that night he died. His last words were: "All composite things decay. Strive diligently!" This was his "Final Blowing-out" (*Parinirvāṇa*). His sorrowing disciples cremated his body, and his ashes were divided between the representatives of various tribal peoples and King Ajātaśatru of Magadha.

The Growth of Buddhism

According to tradition a great gathering of monks met at the Magadhan capital of Rājagṛha soon after the Buddha's death. At this council Upāli, one of the chief disciples, recited the *Vinaya Piṭaka*, or rules of the Order, as he recalled having heard the Buddha give them. Another disciple, Ānanda, who bears a position in Buddhism similar to that of St. John in Christianity, recited the *Sutta Piṭaka*, the great collection of the Buddha's sermons on matters of doctrine and ethics. Though there may have been a council of some sort, the story as it stands is certainly untrue, for it is quite evident that the scriptures of Buddhism grew by a long process of development and accretion, perhaps over several centuries.

A second general council is said to have been held at Vaiśālī, one hundred years after the Buddha's death. Here schism raised its head, ostensibly over small points of monastic discipline, and the Order broke into two sections, the orthodox *Sthaviravādins* (Pāli *Theravādī*) or "Believers in the Teaching of the Elders", and the *Mahāsaṅghikas* or "Members of the Great Community". The tradition of the second council is as dubious as that of the first, but it at least records that schism began very early. The minor points of discipline on which the Order divided were soon followed by doctrinal differences of much greater importance.

Numerous such differences appeared at the third great council, held at Pāṭaliputra under the patronage of Aśoka, which resulted in the expulsion of many heretics and the establishment of the Sthaviravāda school as orthodox. At this council it is said that the last section was added to the Pāli scriptures, the *Kathāvatthu* of the *Abhidhamma Piṭaka*, dealing with psychology and metaphysics. In fact many of the works of this part of the canon are of later composition, and the details of the account of the council are suspect, but the record shows that by this time widespread differences had developed within the Order.

Meanwhile great changes were taking place in the constitution of Buddhism. Some modern authorities believe that the Buddha had no intention of founding a new religion, and never looked on his

doctrine as distinct from the popular cults of the time, but rather as transcending them—a sort of super-doctrine, which would help his followers further along the road to salvation than Brāhmaṇism or Upaniṣadic gnosis. This view is, in our opinion, very questionable. Though the traditions of Buddhism give little evidence of direct antagonism between Buddhists and brāhmaṇs at this early period there was much antagonism between Buddhists and other heterodox sects, such as Jainas and Ājīvikas. These sects did not merely wrangle over doctrinal points, but carried on vigorous propaganda among laymen for their support. We believe that even in the days of the Buddha himself the Order consciously tried to build up a following of layfolk, who would pay to the Buddha their chief if not their only homage. The enormous gifts which so many wealthy people are said to have made to the Order are no doubt exaggerated, but the tradition is more probably partly true than wholly false, and at least some of the wealthy merchants who so liberally supported the new teachings must have looked upon themselves as lay Buddhists.

Whatever its position in the Buddha's lifetime, 200 years later Buddhism was a distinct religion. Aśoka classified all the religions of his empire under five heads; the (Buddhist) *Saṅgha*, the Brāhmaṇs, the Ājīvikas, the Nirgranthas (or Jainas), and "other sects". He further declared that, while he gave his chief patronage to the Buddhists, he honoured and respected them all, and called on his subjects to do likewise.[36]

By Aśoka's time India was covered with *vihāras*, which were both monasteries and temples. In becoming a religion Buddhism borrowed and adapted much from the popular beliefs of the time. Its simple ritual was in no way based on sacrificial Brāhmaṇism, but on the cult of *caityas*, or sacred spots. These were often small groves of trees, or single sacred trees, on the outskirts of villages, and might also include tumuli, such as those in which the ashes of chiefs were buried. These caityas were the abodes of earth-spirits and genii who, to the simpler folk, were more accessible and less expensive to worship than the great gods of the Āryans. The Jaina scriptures show that unorthodox holy-men often made their homes in or near the caityas, no doubt in order to obtain alms from visitors; and the Buddha is said to have respected these local shrines, and to have encouraged his lay followers to revere them.

Soon after the Buddha's death many communities of monks gave up the practice of constant travel except in the rainy season, and settled permanently on the outskirts of towns and villages, often near the local caityas. With time many of these little monasteries grew in size and importance.

It was the cult of the caitya that Buddhism made its own. According to tradition *stūpas* or tumuli were built by the recipients over the divided ashes of the Buddha. Other stūpas, containing the remains of locally revered monks and ascetics of other denominations, rose up all over India in succeeding centuries. Aśoka unearthed the ashes of the Buddha from their original resting places and divided them still further, rearing stūpas for them all over India. The sacred grove or tree of the old popular cult became the Bodhi Tree, a pīpal planted near the stūpa to commemorate the Buddha's enlightenment, an object of great reverence. The original Bodhi Tree of Gayā, under which the Buddha sat, became an object of pilgrimage, and cuttings of it were carried as far as Ceylon. One feature of the Buddhist Cult which has now vanished is the column, perhaps the survival of a phallic emblem or megalith. Such columns existed in many ancient Buddhist monasteries, but their place in the cult is not clear. Temples proper or shrine-rooms do not appear to have been erected until the beginning of the Christian era, when the Buddha began to be worshipped in the form of an image.

His simpler followers evidently raised the Buddha almost to divinity even in his lifetime, and after his death he was worshipped in his symbols—the stūpa, recalling his parinirvāṇa, and the tree, recalling his enlightenment. The worship consisted of circumambulation in the auspicious clockwise direction, and prostrations, with offerings of flowers. Though the more intelligent monks may have recognized his true status, for the ordinary believer he was the greatest of the gods. This is not surprising, for to this day Indians feel and show the utmost respect for those whom they consider holy. It is rather a matter of surprise that it was only 500 years after the Buddha's death that a theology developed which gave full recognition to this state of affairs.

With the support of Aśoka Buddhism greatly expanded, spreading throughout India and to Ceylon. There is some doubt as to how far the doctrine had developed at this time, but at least a rudimentary canon existed, though perhaps not yet committed to writing. The great Buddhist holy places – the Lumbinī Grove at Kapilavastu where the Buddha was born, the Tree of Wisdom at Gayā where he gained enlightenment, the Deer Park near Vārāṇasī where he preached his first sermon, and the grove near Kuśinagara where he died—were visited by many pilgrims, including Aśoka himself.

Though there is a tradition of cruel persecution under Puṣyamitra Śuṅga the faith continued to grow. Of all the religious remains of between 200 B.C. and A.D. 200 so far discovered in India those of Buddhism outnumber those of Brāhmanism, Hinduism and

Jainism together. The old stūpas were enlarged and beautified with carved railings, terraces and gateways. All classes of the community, kings, princes, merchants and craftsmen, made donations to the Order, which are recorded in numerous inscriptions. Though the individual monk was bound by his vows to own no property except bare necessities, and to touch no silver or gold, the monasteries grew rich on the alms of the faithful. The revenues of whole villages were alienated to them by pious kings, and even the individual monks began to take their vows of poverty lightly, for more than one inscription records donations made to the Order by ordained members of it.

Though there is little evidence of strong sectarian animus within the Order, sects already existed, and the scriptures had been codified in more than one recension. It is possible that much of the Pāli canon of the Sthaviravādins, in the form in which we have it, emanates from the great monastery on a hilltop near the modern village of Sānchī, the remains of which are among the finest relics of early Buddhism.

Another very important sect, the *Sarvāstivādins*, was strong in the region of Mathurā and in Kashmīr. It was in Kashmīr, according to a tradition preserved in China, that, under the patronage of Kaniṣka (1st–2nd century A.D., p. 61f), a fourth great council was held, at which the Sarvāstivādin doctrines were codified in a summary, the *Mahāvibhāṣā*. It was chiefly among the Sarvāstivādins, but also in the old schism of the Mahāsaṅghikas, that new ideas developed, which were to form the basis of the division of Buddhism into the "Great" and "Lesser Vehicles" (*Mahāyāna* and *Hīnayāna*). The brāhmaṇs and their lay supporters had by now largely turned from the older gods, whom they worshipped with animal sacrifices, towards others, who were worshipped with reverent devotion. In N.-W. India the rule of Greeks, Śakas and Kuṣāṇas in turn had thrown open the gates to the West, and ideas from Persia and beyond entered India in greater strength than before. In these conditions teachers of the early Christian centuries gave to Buddhism a wholly new outlook. They claimed to have found a new and great vehicle which would carry many souls to salvation, while the Sthaviravādins and kindred sects had but a small one. The Great Vehicle soon became popular in many parts of India, for it fitted the mood of the times and the needs of many simple people better than did the Lesser Vehicle, which then began to lose ground. In Ceylon, however, the Lesser Vehicle resisted all the attacks of the new sects and thence it was later taken to Burma, Thailand and other parts of South-East Asia, where it became the national religion.

The Great Vehicle, on the other hand, itself soon divided by various

schisms, was carried by a succession of Indian monks to China and thence to Japan. By the time of the Guptas it predominated, and Hsüan Tsang, in the 7th century, found the Lesser Vehicle almost extinct in most of India, and only flourishing in a few parts of the West; evidently it had ceased to make a strong emotional appeal in the India of early Hinduism. Buddhism as a whole was already declining. In many places great monasteries were in ruins, and places of pilgrimage almost deserted. But the faith was still important, and had thousands of monks and many prosperous monasteries. Chief of these was Nālandā (p. 166), which, under the patronage of kings of the Pāla line, remained a centre of Buddhist piety and learning until the Muslim invasion. From Nālandā the missionary monk Padmasambhava went forth to convert Tibet to Buddhism in the 8th century, while pilgrims from as far afield as China and South-East Asia visited it to learn the pure doctrine.

At this time the general standards of culture in North India were declining. From the end of the Gupta period onwards Indian religion became more and more permeated with primitive ideas of sympathetic magic and sexual mysticism, and Buddhism was much affected by these developments. A third vehicle, "the Vehicle of the Thunderbolt" (*Vajrayāna*), appeared in Eastern India in the 8th century, and grew rapidly in Bengal and Bihār. It was this form of Buddhism, modified by primitive local cults and practices, which was finally established in Tibet in the 11th century, as a result of missions sent from the great Vajrayāna monastery of Vikramaśīla, in Bihār.

Anti-Buddhist persecution was not wholly unknown at this time. In the 6th century the Hūṇa king Mihirakula destroyed monasteries and killed monks. A fanatical Śaivite king of Bengal, Śaśāṅka, in the course of an attack on Kānyakubja at the very beginning of the 7th century, almost destroyed the Tree of Wisdom at Gayā. There are other less reliable accounts of persecution, but it is certain that this was not the main cause of the disappearance of Buddhism from India. A more important factor was the revived and reformed Hinduism, which began to spread northwards from the Tamil country from the 9th century onwards, when the great theologian Śaṅkara travelled the length and breadth of India disputing with the Buddhists. Behind him he left an organized body of Hindu monks to carry on his work. The new form of devotional Hinduism made a very vigorous appeal to the ordinary man, and the persistent tendency of Hinduism to assimilate, rather than to attack, was always at work.

As early as the Gupta period Buddhist monks often took part in Hindu processions. The Buddhist family, which gave its chief support to the local monastery, would at all times rely on the services

of brāhmaṇs at births, marriages and deaths. If for a time Buddhism became to all intents and purposes a separate religion, denying the Vedas, the ordinary layman might not see it in that light. For him Buddhism was one of many cults and faiths, by no means mutually exclusive, all of which led to salvation, and all of which were respectable and worthy of honour. Thus, in medieval North India, the Buddha came to be looked on as the ninth of the ten incarnations of the great god Viṣṇu, (p. 309), and Buddhism gradually lost its individuality, becoming a special and rather unorthodox Hindu sect, which, like many others, did not survive. Hinduism, relying for its strength mainly on independent brāhmaṇs and ascetics and on domestic ceremonies, suffered from the Muslim invasion but was not seriously weakened by it. Buddhism, by now mainly concentrated in large monasteries and already rapidly declining in influence, could not stand up to the change. In the first rush of the Muslim advance down the Gangā Nālandā and other great monasteries of Bihār were sacked, libraries were burnt, and monks were put to the sword. Most of the survivors fled to the mountains of Nepāl and Tibet, but some Buddhist monasteries still survived in Bihār and East Bengal. An illuminated Buddhist manuscript contains a colophon stating that it was prepared in Bihār in the 15th century.[37] This is our last record of Indian Buddhism, until its revival in recent years.

The Lesser Vehicle

According to Sinhalese tradition the Pāli canon of the Sthaviravādin school was committed to writing in Ceylon, in the reign of King Vaṭṭagāmaṇi (89–77 B.C.), after it had been finally established at a great council of Sinhalese monks. If we are to believe tradition it had already been sifted and codified at the three councils of Rājagṛha, Vaiśālī and Pāṭaliputra, and had been passed down by word of mouth for some four centuries by teachers who had not the strict mnemonic system of the Vedic schools. As late as the 5th century A.D. written scriptures were rare, and the pilgrim Fa-hsien was hard put to it to find a good copy of the *Vinaya Piṭaka*. Probably even the codification of the canon in Ceylon did not wholly end the process of accretion and interpolation.

At the same time as the canon old commentaries in Sinhalese Prākrit were also committed to writing. These were translated into Pāli, and no doubt considerably altered and expanded, by the great doctor Buddhaghosa, who worked in Ceylon in the 5th century. The original commentaries have completely vanished, and some have doubted whether they ever existed, but it is certain that Buddhaghosa had access to many early traditions not recorded elsewhere.

a

Victoria & Albert Museum. Crown Copyright

Yakṣī, bearing a *chaurī*. Dīdārganj, Bihar. ? 1st century B.C.
(Now in Patnā Museum)

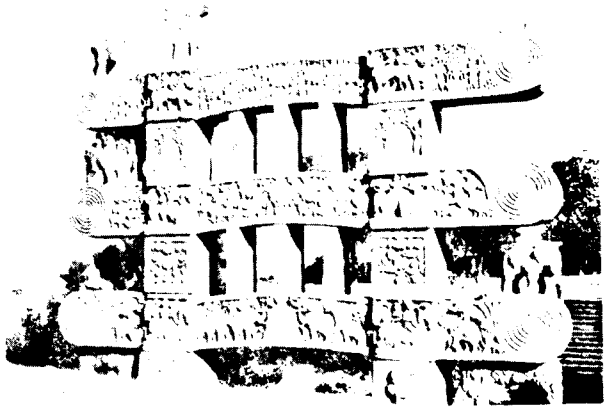
b

Dept. of Archaeology, Government of India

Liṅgam, Gudimallam, Madras. 1st century B.C.

Plate 17

a



A. L. Basham

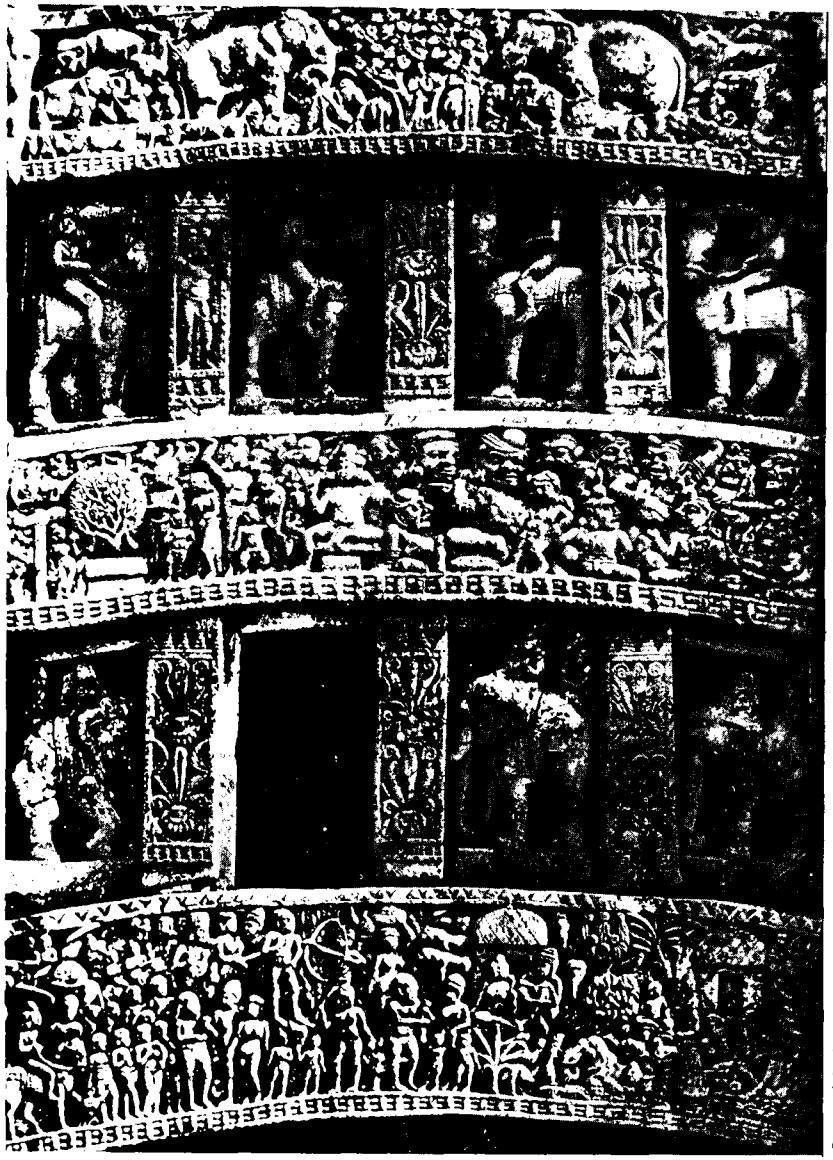
Architraves of the East Gateway, Sānchī, M.P. End of 1st century B.C.

b

Dept. of Archaeology, Government of India

Corner of East Gateway (front), Sanchi

Plate 18



Dept. of Archaeology, Government of India

Architraves of North Gateway (back), Sānchī

Top: Illustration of the Jataka story of the Six-tusked Elephant

Middle: The demon hosts of Māra (left of centre) tempt the Buddha, symbolized by the vacant throne under the Bodhi Tree on the left

Bottom: The story of Vessantara, told from right to left: (i) Vessantara and his family in a hut in the forest; (ii) he gives away his two children; (iii) he gives away his wife; (iv) he is reunited with his family

Plate 19

a

Messrs. Faber & Faber, Royal Academy Trustees and Indian Museum, Calcutta

b

Victoria & Albert Museum. Crown Copyright

Yaksī with bird and cage; above, a lady at her toilet. Mathurā, 1st-2nd century A.D.

Bacchanalian Scene. Curzon Museum, Mathurā

c

Messrs. Faber & Faber, Royal Academy Trustees and Curzon Museum, Mathura

Head of Kuṣāṇa King. Mathurā

Plate 20

a

b

Dept. of Archaeology, Government of India

c

Dept. of Archaeology, Government of India

Headless Statue of King Kaniṣka. Mathurā. 1st 2nd century A.D.

The Buddha Preaching. Gandhara School

Indo-Corinthian Capital, Jamalgarhi, Peshawar. 1st 2nd century A.D.

Head of the Buddha. Gandhara School. 4th 5th century A.D.

d

Victoria & Albert Museum. Crown Copyright

Plate 21

Raymond Burnier, 'Hindu Medieval Sculpture', La Palme, Paris

Apsaras. Khajurāho. 10th-11th century A.D.

Plate 32

As it stands today the Pāli canon of the Sthaviravādins, including the scriptures, commentaries and semi-canonical texts, would fill a fair-sized bookcase. It consists of three sections called "baskets" (*piṭaka*), from the fact that the long strips of prepared palm-leaf on which the texts were written were originally stored in baskets. These three are known as the *Vinaya* ("Conduct"), *Sutta* * ("Sermon") and *Abhidhamma* ("Metaphysics") *Piṭakas.*

The *Vinaya Piṭaka* contains pronouncements attributed to the Buddha, laying down numerous rules for the conduct of the Order. With each rule the circumstances which led the Buddha to propound it are given, and thus the *Vinaya* contains much early traditional matter.

The largest and most important of the "Three Baskets" is the *Sutta Piṭaka*, which is divided into five "Groups" (*Nikāya*):

(1) *Dīgha* (Long) *Nikāya*, a collection of long sermons ascribed to the Buddha, with accounts of the circumstances in which he preached them.

(2) *Majjhima* (Medium) *Nikāya*, shorter sermons.

(3) *Saṃyutta* (Connected) *Nikāya*, collections of brief pronouncements on kindred topics.

(4) *Aṅguttara* (Graduated) *Nikāya*, a collection of over 2,000 brief statements, arranged rather artificially in eleven sections, according to the number of topics treated in each statement. Thus Section Two contains a discussion on the two things which a man should avoid, Section Three, one on the trinity of thought, word and deed, and so on.

(5) *Khuddaka* (Minor) *Nikāya*, miscellaneous works in prose and verse, some very ancient, but certainly added to the canon later than the four other Nikāyas. Among the contents of the Khuddaka are the *Dhammapada* ("Verses on Virtue"), the *Theragāthā* and the *Therīgāthā* ("Hymns of the Elder Monks and Nuns), which contain some of India's greatest religious poetry, and the *Jātaka*, a collection of over 500 poems, briefly outlining folk-tales and other stories, which were originally intended to be told in the words of a narrator. The tales are told in full in a prose commentary attributed to Buddhaghosa, which is invariably published with the verses. Many of the tales are secular, and they do not all convey a very exalted message, but they have all been given an odour of sanctity by being ascribed to the Buddha, who is said to have told them as recollections of his previous births as a *Bodhisattva*, a being destined to become a Buddha. These racy and vivid stories are great as literature, and will be considered elsewhere in that aspect (p. 455ff). They are an invaluable source of social history.

The third Piṭaka, *Abhidhamma*, consists of some drily pedantic works on Buddhist psychology and metaphysics of little interest except to the specialist. It is certainly later than the other two Piṭakas.

* The Pāli form. The Sanskrit is *Sūtra*. As the Sthaviravādins regularly used Pāli, Pāli forms of names and terms are generally employed in this section, except where the Sanskrit form is better known.

As well as the canon and its many commentaries there are several semi-canonical works. Chief of these is the "Questions of Menander" (*Milinda-pañha*), an account of the discussions of the Greco-Bactrian king and the monk Nāgasena, which is written with such literary and dialectical skill that it has been suggested, without much evidence, that the author knew something of Plato. Of a different character are the verse chronicles which tell the history of Buddhism in Ceylon, and give valuable information on political and social history also. Of these, the earliest, *Dīpavaṃsa* (the "Island Chronicle") dates from the 4th century A.D., and has no literary merit, but the *Mahāvaṃsa* ("Great Chronicle"), of the following century, contains passages of beauty and vigour (p. 459f). It was continued as the *Cūlavaṃsa* ("Lesser Chronicle") by a succession of monks down to the fall of the kingdom of Kandy to the British at the beginning of the 19th century and we understand that a further appendix has recently been added, bringing it down to the present day.

The basic propositions of this great body of literature are not metaphysical but psychological. Sorrow, suffering, dissatisfaction, and all the manifold unpleasantnesses which are referred to by the word *dukkha*, are inherent in life as it is ordinarily lived; they can only be eliminated by giving up "thirst" (*taṇhā*, often translated "craving"), which includes personal ambition, desire, longing, and selfishness of all kinds. According to orthodox teaching the cause of this "thirst" is the innate but mistaken conviction of individuality—that there is in each living being a permanent core, an ego or soul. While this doctrine was subscribed to at a very early period by all Buddhist sects some modern authorities deny that it was propounded by the Buddha, and claim that he merely taught the abandonment of selfhood and individualism on the lower plane of everyday life, but maintained the existence of an eternal soul. This proposition we find hard to believe, despite certain apparent inconsistencies in the Pāli scriptures. If we can place any reliance at all upon the legend of the Buddha's life, the knowledge gained under the Tree of Wisdom was startlingly original, and not a mere rehash of the lore of the Upaniṣadic sages with a comparatively slight shifting of emphasis.

Whatever the Buddha's original doctrine, there can be no question about the fundamental teaching of Buddhism, the kernel of which is contained in the "Sermon of the Turning of the Wheel of the Law" (*Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta*), which the Buddha is said to have preached to his first disciples at Vārāṇasī. This contains the "Four Noble Truths", and the "Noble Eightfold Path", which are accepted as basic categories by all Buddhist sects. We give it in a somewhat abridged form.

"Thus I have heard. Once the Master was at Vārāṇasī, at the deer park called Isipatana. There the Master addressed the five monks:

"'There are two ends not to be served by a wanderer. What are those two? The pursuit of desires and of the pleasure which springs from desires, which is base, common, leading to rebirth, ignoble and unprofitable; and the pursuit of pain and hardship, which is grievous, ignoble and unprofitable. The Middle Way of the Tathāgata * avoids both these ends; it is enlightened, it brings clear vision, it makes for wisdom, and leads to peace, insight, full wisdom and Nirvāṇa. What is this Middle Way? . . . It is the Noble Eightfold Path—Right Views, Right Resolve, Right Speech, Right Conduct, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Recollection and Right Meditation. This is the Middle Way. . . .

"'And this is the Noble Truth of Sorrow. Birth is sorrow, age is sorrow, disease is sorrow, death is sorrow, contact with the unpleasant is sorrow, separation from the pleasant is sorrow, every wish unfulfilled is sorrow—in short all the five components of individuality are sorrow.

"'And this is the Noble Truth of the Arising of Sorrow. [It arises from] thirst, which leads to rebirth, which brings delight and passion, and seeks pleasure now here, now there—the thirst for sensual pleasure, the thirst for continued life, the thirst for power.

"'And this is the Noble Truth of the Stopping of Sorrow. It is the complete stopping of that thirst so that no passion remains, leaving it, being emancipated from it, being released from it, giving no place to it.

"'And this is the Noble Truth of the Way which Leads to the Stopping of Sorrow. It is the Noble Eightfold Path—Right Views, Right Resolve, Right Speech, Right Conduct, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Recollection and Right Meditation.' "[38]

Though there are many difficulties in interpreting the finer points of this short sermon its main message is quite clear—sorrow (remembering that the Pāli word *dukkha* covers a far wider range of feeling than the English word with which we translate it) is inherent in ordinary life; it is due to craving for individual satisfaction; it can only be stopped by stopping that craving; and this can only be done by taking a middle course between self-indulgence and extreme asceticism and leading a moral and well ordered life.

This very simple doctrine was developed in various rather pedantic forms, most important of which was the "Chain of Dependent Origination" (*Paṭicca-samuppāda*), a series of twelve terms, repeated in more than one passage of the Pāli scriptures, commented on again and again by ancient and modern scholars, and perhaps not fully understood by anybody. Out of Ignorance arises Imagination,

* "He who has thus attained"—one of the titles of the Buddha.

thence Self-consciousness, thence Name and Form (i.e. corporeal existence), thence the Six Senses,* thence Contact, thence Feeling (or Emotion), thence Craving, thence Attachment, thence Becoming, thence Rebirth, and thence all the manifold ills that flesh is heir to.

The mechanics of this doctrine are indeed obscure, but it shows that the craving which, according to the Buddha's first sermon, is at the bottom of human misery is ultimately due to ignorance—a sort of cosmic ignorance which leads to the delusion of selfhood. The ignorance primarily concerns the fundamental nature of the universe, which has three salient characteristics—it is full of sorrow (*dukkha*), it is transient (*anicca*), and it is soulless (*anatta*).

The universe is sorrowful. Buddhists would not claim that there is no happiness in the world, but that in some form or other sorrow is inevitable in every aspect of life. "As the ocean has only one flavour, the flavour of salt," the Buddha is purported to have said, "so has my doctrine only one flavour—the flavour of emancipation [from sorrow]."[39] In ordinary existence sorrow cannot be long avoided.

The universe is transient. There is no abiding entity anywhere. In this Buddhism has much in common with the teaching of Heraclitus. Every being or object, however stable and homogeneous it may appear, is in reality transient and composite. Man, who thinks himself to be eternal and individualized, is actually a compound of five psychosomatic elements—Body, Feelings, Perceptions, States of Mind, and Awareness. These five vary from minute to minute and there is no permanent substratum to them. The old man is evidently not the same person as the baby in arms of seventy years ago, and similarly he is not the same as the man of a moment ago. At every instant the old man vanishes, and a new man, caused by the first, comes into being, though a specious continuity is given by the chain of cause and effect which links one with the other. Buddhism knows no being, but only becoming. Everything is resolved into momentary configurations of events.† The universe is in continuous flux, and all idea of permanence is part of the basic ignorance out of which sorrow springs.

Thus there is no immortal soul. The universe is soulless. In transmigration nothing passes over from one life to another—only a new life arises as part of the chain of events which includes the old. Even the gods are soulless and the World Soul of the Upaniṣads is an illusion. The Buddhism of the Lesser Vehicle is therefore a

* The sixth being thought.

† Called *dharmas*, the term here used in a special sense.

religion without souls and without God. No Buddhist teacher was rash enough to deny the existence of the gods outright, but they were thought of as beings in no way supernatural or different from man except in their greater happiness and power. In his search for salvation the true Buddhist by-passed them, for they could neither help nor hinder him greatly, and they would in any case do what they were able to assist him if he kept to the Middle Way.

On these premisses the machinery of transmigration—a doctrine which was taken over by Buddhism from the general beliefs of the time—is hard to explain. If nothing passes from life to life the newborn being cannot be thought of as in any way connected with the being who has died, and whose actions have conditioned his present state. Yet the new being suffers as a result of the actions of the old one. This objection was often raised by the opponents of Buddhism, and was countered by the analogy of the flame of a lamp, which might kindle a flame in another lamp and then be extinguished. If this simile was unconvincing, it was pointed out that the old man, though not, on ultimate analysis, the same person as the young one, suffered illness as a result of the excesses of his youth, and so one being might suffer as a result of the evil done by an earlier being who was part of the chain of cause and effect leading up to his present existence. Terms like "individual", "person", and so on were merely convenient labels for a series of separate momentary events which continued indefinitely, just as "chariot" was a convenient label for a collection of pieces of wood and metal put together in a certain manner.

The only stable entity in Sthaviravāda Buddhism was *Nirvāṇa* (in Pali, *Nibbāna*), the state of bliss reached by the Buddhas and *Arhants*, or perfected beings. Nirvāṇa is difficult to understand for one who has not experienced it, and some early Western scholars believed that it implied complete annihilation. A statement attributed to the Buddha: "I have not said that the Arhant exists after death, and I have not said that he does not exist . . . because . . . this is not edifying, neither does it tend to supreme wisdom"[40] would suggest that Nirvāṇa was believed to be a state neither of being nor of annihilation. The Aristotelian Law of the Excluded Middle was never strictly applied in Indian thought, and a third state, transcending both being and not-being, would not be considered an impossibility. If the whole world was in a state of flux and Nirvāṇa was a state of rest this too did not present an insuperable paradox, for Nirvāṇa was outside the universe; it underlay it, but was not part of it.

Such a concept is not very different from that of the World Soul of

the Upaniṣads, and, far from being looked on as a state of annihilation, Nirvāṇa was sometimes described in brilliantly colourful language—"a glorious city, stainless and undefiled, pure and white, unaging, deathless, secure and calm and happy".[41] Nirvāṇa has no definite location, but it may be realized anywhere and at any time, while still in the flesh. The man who finds it never again loses it, and when he dies he passes to this state for ever, in his *parinirvāṇa*, his "Final Blowing Out".

The doctrines which we have described are those of the Sthaviravādin sect of the Lesser Vehicle, which is the only surviving sect of that branch of Buddhism, and is today dominant in Ceylon, Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos. Other sects of the Lesser Vehicle have now quite disappeared, though they survived longer in India itself than the Sthaviravādins. Chief among these was the sect of the *Sarvāstivādins* (They who say "All is"), who had a canon in Sanskrit, and who differed from the Sthaviravādins in their view that the constituents of phenomena (*dharmas*) are not wholly momentary, but exist for ever in a latent form. Another important sect was that of the *Sautrāntikas*, who maintained that our knowledge of the outside world is only a feasible inference, and who were well on the way to the idealism of some schools of the Great Vehicle. A fourth sect, the *Sammitīyas*, even went so far as to reject the doctrine of soullessness and to postulate a sort of soul in the *pudgala* or person, which passes from life to life. These early sects of Buddhism probably gave much encouragement to the evolution of Indian philosophy, as distinct from mystical thought.

Though the Buddha is said to have disapproved of speculation on the origin and end of the world, Buddhists of the Lesser Vehicle devised a cosmological scheme, based largely on prevalent Indian ideas, which accounted for the existence of the world without the intervention of a creator.

As in all Indian cosmologies the universe is cyclic. Over an enormous period of time (*mahākalpa*) it goes through a process of evolution and decline, only to evolve once more. The cycle is divided into four great periods (*asaṅkhyeya*). In the first man declines, and at last everything is destroyed except the highest heaven; the good go to this heaven, and the sinners to the hells of other universes, which may at that time be passing through different stages. The second period is one of quiescence. In the third period evolution again begins. The good karma of the beings in the highest heaven begins to fail, and the "World of Form", a lower heaven, evolves. A great being dies in the highest heaven and is reborn in the World of Form as the god Brahmā. As he is the only living thing therein he is

lonely. But other beings follow him from the highest heaven to the lower. As Brahmā was the first to be born in the World of Form, and their birth agrees with his wishes, he imagines that he is the creator of the other gods, and of all the world, which actually comes into existence through cosmic law. Meanwhile the earth develops, as well as other earths. The first men are fairy-like beings, but gradually they degenerate and become earthbound (p. 83). The fourth period is one of continuation, marked only by a regular pattern of comparative advance and decline, forming a series of lesser cycles within the greater one. This process is repeated for all eternity, but one great cycle is not exactly like the next. There are "Buddha cycles" and "empty cycles", and we are fortunate that we live in a Buddha cycle, in which four Buddhas (Krakucchanda, Kanakamuni, Kaśyapa, and Śākyamuni*) have taught and a fifth (Maitreya) is yet to come.

The Evolution of the Great Vehicle

It is nowhere claimed in the Pāli scriptures that the Buddha was in any way supernatural. His supreme insight was gained by his own efforts, after many ages of striving in many different births. But his birth, enlightenment and death were cosmic events of the highest importance, and his greatness was such that he was revered even by the mighty gods Brahmā and Śakra (an epithet of Indra commonly used by the Buddhists), not to speak of the myriads of lesser deities inhabiting earth and heaven. He is reported to have said that whoever had faith in him and love for him was assured of a rebirth in heaven,[42] a prospect which, as we know from Aśoka's inscriptions, was much more intelligible and desirable to the ordinary man than the rarefied and indescribable Nirvāṇa.

When the Buddha died, according to orthodox theory, the chain of his existence was broken. He finally entered the Nirvāṇa which he had realized at his enlightenment, and ceased to be an individual, or to affect the universe in any way. Just before his death he had told his disciples to rely on the Doctrine for leadership. But soon after his death, if not before, his followers evolved the "Three Jewels", which form the basic profession of faith of Buddhism, and which every Buddhist, both monastic and lay, repeats to this day: "I go for refuge to the Buddha; I go for refuge to the Doctrine (*Dharma*); I go for refuge to the Order (*Saṅgha*)." Though the theologists might explain away the first of the Three Jewels, on the obvious interpretation "going for refuge to the Buddha" implied that

* "The Sage of the Śākyas", a title of Gautama Buddha.

the Master, as distinct from his teaching, was in some way still present and able to help his followers.

The Buddha himself probably taught that he was the last of a long succession of earlier Buddhas, who had lived before him. According to tradition these former Buddhas were revered even in the historical Buddha's lifetime. By Mauryan times their cult was widespread, and was patronized by Aśoka. In the end the orthodox Sthaviravādin school counted no less than twenty-five Buddhas, not to speak of a large number of *pratyeka-buddhas*, who had found the truth for themselves without guidance, but had not taught it to the world.

The carvings of the stūpas of Bhārhut and Sānchī, executed in the 2nd and 1st centuries B.C., depict crowds of adoring worshippers reverencing the symbols of the Buddha. A little later sculptors began to carve images of the Buddha himself, and within a few generations all Buddhist sects took to worshipping images. Buddhism kept up with the times, and by the Middle Ages, even in the shrines of the Lesser Vehicle, the Buddha was worshipped just as a Hindu god, with flowers, incense, waving lamps, and deep devotion.

Among the doctrines of Zoroastrianism, which has strongly influenced other religions both East and West, is that of the Saviour (*Šaošyant*), who at the end of the world will lead the forces of good and light against those of evil and darkness. Under the invading rulers of N.-W. India Zoroastrianism and Buddhism came in contact, and it was probably through this that the idea of the future Buddha became part of orthodox belief. If there had been Buddhas before Gautama there would be Buddhas after him. By the time of the "Questions of Menander", around the beginning of the Christian era, the cult of the future Buddha, Maitreya, was widespread among all Buddhist sects.

According to the older conceptions the Buddha wrought many deeds of kindness and mercy in a long series of transmigrations as a *Bodhisattva*, before achieving his final birth as the Sage of the Śākyas; but, since Maitreya and other unnamed Buddhas after him are yet to come, there must be Bodhisattvas existing at present in the universe, who are working continuously for the welfare of all things living. The Jātaka stories show that Bodhisattvas can be incarnated as men, or even as animals; but the more advanced Bodhisattvas, who have the greatest power for good, must be divine beings in the heavens.

Though neither omniscient nor almighty these celestial Bodhisattvas might be adored and prayed to without any misgiving, for it was part of their mission to answer prayer. The Bodhisattva doctrine, a logical development from the older Buddhism, thus peopled the heavens with mighty forces of goodness, and presented

Buddhism with a new mythology. It was this which formed the hallmark of the Mahāyāna, the Great Vehicle.

The Great Vehicle

According to the older doctrine the Bodhisattva works in wisdom and love through many lives so that he may become a Buddha, and ordinary believers are encouraged to follow his example and win Nirvāṇa as quickly as possible. Yet, since the Bodhisattva is a being of immeasurable charity and compassion, surely while one suffering individual remains in the toils of transmigration he will not leave him without help and enter Nirvāṇa, where he can be of no further service to the world. So, quite logically, in the schools of the Great Vehicle the Bodhisattva was thought of not as a being who was soon to become a Buddha, but as one who would bide his time until even the smallest insect had reached the highest goal. The old ideal of the Arhant, the "Worthy" who achieved Nirvāṇa and would be reborn no more, began to be looked on as rather selfish. Instead of striving to become Arhants men should aim at becoming Bodhisattvas, and by the spiritual merit which they gained assist all living beings on the way to perfection.

The idea of transference of merit is a special feature of the teaching of the Great Vehicle. According to the Lesser Vehicle a man can only help another on the Way by example and advice. Each being must be a lamp unto himself, and work out his own salvation. But the belief in transference of merit spread very widely, even affecting the sects of the Lesser Vehicle. The numerous Buddhist dedicatory inscriptions throughout India often contain some such phrase as: "May it be for the welfare of [the donor's] mother and father and of all living beings."

Moreover, the Bodhisattva was thought of as a spirit not only of compassion but also of suffering. In more than one source we read the vow or resolve of the Bodhisattva, which is sometimes expressed in almost Christian terms:

> "I take upon myself . . . the deeds of all beings, even of those in the hells, in other worlds, in the realms of punishment. . . . I take their suffering upon me, . . . I bear it, I do not draw back from it, I do not tremble at it, . . . I have no fear of it, . . . I do not lose heart. . . . I must bear the burden of all beings, for I have vowed to save all things living, to bring them safe through the forest of birth, age, disease, death and rebirth. I think not of my own salvation, but strive to bestow on all beings the royalty of supreme wisdom. So I take upon myself all the sorrows of all beings. I resolve to bear every torment in every purgatory of the universe. For it is better

that I alone suffer than the multitude of living beings. I give myself in exchange. I redeem the universe from the forest of purgatory, from the womb of flesh, from the realm of death. I agree to suffer as a ransom for all beings, for the sake of all beings. Truly I will not abandon them. For I have resolved to gain supreme wisdom for the sake of all that lives, to save the world."[43]

The idea of the Suffering Saviour may have existed in some form in the Middle East before Christianity, but features like this are not attested in Buddhism until after the beginning of the Christian era. The Suffering Bodhisattva so closely resembles the Christian conception of the God who gives his life as a ransom for many that we cannot dismiss the possibility that the doctrine was borrowed by Buddhism from Christianity, which was vigorous in Persia from the 3rd century A.D. onwards.

The universe of the Great Vehicle contains numerous Bodhisattvas, chief of whom, from the earthly point of view, is *Avalokiteśvara* ("The Lord who Looks Down"), also called *Padmapāṇi* ("The Lotus-Bearer") (pl. XLIV). His special attribute is compassion, and his helping hand reaches even to *Avīci*, the deepest and most unpleasant of the Buddhist purgatories. Another important Bodhisattva is *Mañjuśrī*, whose special activity is to stimulate the understanding, and who is depicted with a naked sword in one hand, to destroy error and falsehood, and a book in the other, describing the ten *pāramitās*, or great spiritual perfections, which are the cardinal virtues developed by Bodhisattvas.* *Vajrapāṇi*, a sterner Bodhisattva, is the foe of sin and evil, and like the god Indra bears a thunderbolt in his hand. The gentle *Maitreya*, the future Buddha, is worshipped as a Bodhisattva. Also worthy of mention is *Kṣitigarbha*, the guardian of the purgatories, who is thought of not as a fierce torturer but rather as the governor of a model prison, doing his best to make life tolerable for his charges, and helping them to earn remission of sentence. Though the Great Vehicle agrees in theory with the Lesser that the world is full of sorrow, it is fundamentally optimistic. The world contains much good as well as evil, and there is help for all who ask. Every living thing, from the humblest worm upwards, is in a sense a Bodhisattva, for most schools of the Great Vehicle maintain implicitly or explicitly that ultimately all beings will attain Nirvāṇa and become Buddha.

The Great Vehicle was not content with creating this pantheon of

* Charity (*dāna*), good conduct (*śīla*), forbearance (*kṣānti*), courage (*vīrya*), meditation (*dhyāna*), insight (*prajñā*), "skill in knowing what means to take" (to help beings to achieve salvation) (*upāyakauśalya*), resolution (*praṇidhāna*), power (*bala*), and knowledge (*jñāna*). In some lists only the first six are mentioned. Much mysticism surrounded the idea of the Prajñāpāramitās, especially in the Vajrayāna School.

noble and beneficient Bodhisattvas. Probably developing from the old heresy of the Mahāsaṅghika school (p. 263) the idea arose that Gautama Buddha had not been a mere man, but the earthly expression of a mighty spiritual being. This being has three bodies; a Body of Essence (*Dharmakāya*), a Body of Bliss (*Sambhogakāya*), and a Created Body (*Nirmāṇakāya*), and of these only the last was seen on earth. The Body of Essence eternally penetrates and permeates the universe; it is the ultimate Buddha, of which the other two bodies are emanations, more or less unreal. The Body of Bliss exists in the heavens, and will continue until the final resolution of all things in the Body of Essence. The Created Body was a mere emanation of the Body of Bliss. This reminds us of the Docetic heresy in Christianity, and it is possible that Docetism and the doctrine of the Three Bodies owe much to a common gnostic source in the Middle East.

The Buddha's Body of Bliss is the presiding deity of the most important Mahāyāna heaven, Sukhāvatī, the "Happy Land", where the blessed are reborn in the buds of lotuses, which rise from a lovely lake before the Buddha's throne. This divine Buddha is usually called *Amitābha* (Immeasurable Glory) or *Amitāyus* (Immeasurable Age). He too shares the compassion of the Bodhisattva, for, though he enjoys endless and infinite bliss, he maintains an interest in his world, and especially in his heaven. At his touch the lotuses open to give birth to the blessed, who are nourished and grow through the food of his word. According to some Chinese and Japanese sects whoever calls on his name, however sinful he may have been, is assured of rebirth in his heaven. Amitābha is, in fact, a Father in Heaven. He, the historical Gautama Buddha, and the Bodhisattva Avalokiteśvara are closely associated, and play a bigger part in Mahāyānist thought than do other Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, because they are chiefly concerned with this region of the universe and this period of cosmic time, but there are many other heavenly Buddhas, presiding over other heavens and other universes. All are emanations of the primal Body of Essence, which is no other than the Brahman, the World Soul or Absolute of the Upaniṣads, in different guise. The Body of Essence is sometimes referred to in later Buddhist writings as *Ādi Buddha*, "the Primeval Buddha", and is also described as "the Void" (*Śūnya*), "the True" (*Tattva*), "Wisdom" (*Bodhi*), or "the Womb of those who Attain the Goal" (*Tathāgatagarbha*). Moreover it is Nirvāṇa. The final state, which the Sthaviravādin school found so difficult to describe in words, was for most sects of the Great Vehicle not really different from the mystical union with the absolute Brahman of the Upaniṣads. The wheel turned full circle, and the

mystical monism which early Buddhism so strongly opposed found its way into later Buddhism, but with a new terminology.

Most Buddhist sects of both Vehicles had their own versions of the Piṭakas, but, with the exception of the Pāli Piṭakas of the Sthaviravādins, these have not survived in entirety, and in the schools of the Great Vehicle their place was largely taken by later texts, mostly written in the early centuries of the Christian era. These are in Sanskrit, which became the official language of the Great Vehicle in India, though in other parts of Asia it tended to prefer the local tongue. Many of these texts are ostensibly sermons of the Buddha, but of much greater length than those of the Sutta Piṭaka; hence they were known as *Vaipulya Sūtras* ("Expanded Sermons").

Among the earliest Mahāyāna texts is the *Lalitavistara*, a flowery narrative of the life of the Buddha, containing much more of the supernatural and the marvellous than the Pāli account; this text was utilized by Sir Edwin Arnold for *The Light of Asia*, a lengthy poem on the Buddha's life which enjoyed much popularity at the end of the last century, and is still readable, though its style has somewhat dated. Other important scriptures are the *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka* ("The Lotus of the Good Law"), a long series of dialogues of considerable literary merit; the *Vajracchedika* ("Diamond Cutter"), containing very subtle metaphysical writing; the *Sukhāvatīvyūha*, describing the glories of Amitābha and his paradise; the *Karaṇḍavyūha*, glorifying Avalokiteśvara; and the *Aṣṭasahasrikaprajñāpāramitā*, a work describing the spiritual perfections of the Bodhisattvas (p. 278, n). Literature on this latter subject was considerable. As well as these sacred texts the Great Vehicle produced much religious poetry and a great deal of sectarian philosophical literature, some of very high merit.

The Sthaviravādin commentators were perhaps hampered by the Buddha's injunctions against unnecessary speculation, and, though they could on occasion argue very logically, they produced comparatively few works of systematic philosophy. The Great Vehicle, on the other hand, produced many. It had two chief philosophical schools, the *Mādhyamika* and the *Yogācāra*.

The *Mādhyamika* ("Intermediate") School, so called because it took a line midway between the uncompromising realism of the Sarvāstivādins and the idealism of the Yogācāra, looked back to one of India's greatest philosophers, Nāgārjuna, who according to tradition was a contemporary of Kaniṣka, and whose *Mādhyamika Kārikā* formed the basic text of the school. We have seen that in almost all Buddhist sects the universe was believed to be a flux of momentary

but interdependent events (*dharma*). Nāgārjuna showed by very subtle arguments that on final analysis the cosmic flux was unreal, as was the consciousness which perceived it and which was itself part of the flux. Therefore Saṃsāra, the immeasurably long process of transmigration, did not really exist. If the world of change was unreal, its contrary, Nirvāṇa, was also unreal. There was therefore no difference between Saṃsāra and Nirvāṇa, which were one and the same in their common nonentity. In fact if all things were equally unreal, they were on ultimate analysis one and the same. The One Thing which alone had real existence could have no predicate; it was therefore called by Nāgārjuna "Emptiness", or "the Void" (*Śūnyatā*).

This philosophical nihilism did not lead Nāgārjuna and his followers to scepticism or agnosticism. Though nothing but the Void was wholly real, the world and all that it contained, from Amitābha downwards, had a qualified practical reality; and the great Void underlying all the universe was, in fact, the Body of Essence itself, the Primeval Buddha, Nirvāṇa. Final immeasurable bliss was here and now for all who would perceive it—not something remote and cold, but the very breath of life, nearer and more real than one's own heart. "The life of the world is the same as Nirvāṇa . . .", said the Mādhyamikas, "and really there is no difference between them at all".[44]

The *Yogācāra* ("Way of Union") or *Vijñānavādin* School completely rejected the realism of the Lesser Vehicle, and maintained a thorough-going idealism, not even allowing the qualified realism of the Mādhyamikas. The world was built by the consciousness, and had no more reality than a dream. The only reality was "Suchness" (*Tathātā*), also called *Dharmadhātu* (freely translated "the Raw Material of Phenomena"), which was equivalent to Nāgārjuna's Void. The Yogācāra school, though perhaps less influential than the Mādhyamika, produced many important philosophers and logicians. Chief of these were Asaṅga, a monk of Peshāwar of the 4th or 5th century, whose *Sūtrālaṅkāra* is the earliest text of the school, Vasubandhu, the younger brother of Asaṅga, and the great logicians Dignāga and Dharmakīrti. Among the most important writings of Yogācāra is the *Laṅkāvatāra Sūtra*, a lengthy text of great subtlety.

The Vehicle of the Thunderbolt

Quite early in the history of the Great Vehicle feminine divinities found their way into the pantheon. One such was Prajñāpāramitā, the Perfection of Insight, the personification of the qualities of the Bodhisattva. Later the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, who were

thought of as male, were, like the gods of Hinduism, endowed with wives who were the active aspect, the "force" or "potency" (*śakti*) of their husbands. The god was believed to be transcendent and aloof, while the goddess was active in the world; thus the god might be best approached through the goddess. The productive activity of the divine was thought of in terms of sexual union, an idea as old as the *Ṛg Veda*. With the spread of these ideas sexual symbolism, and even sexual intercourse as a religious rite, were incorporated into the teachings of some schools of both Hinduism and Buddhism.

With these ideas was combined a new magical mysticism. The Lesser Vehicle taught that release was obtained by the gradual loss of individuality through self-discipline and meditation; the Great Vehicle added that the grace and help of the heavenly Buddhas and Bodhisattvas assisted the process. The followers of the new teachings taught that it could be best attained by acquiring magical power, which they called *vajra* ("thunderbolt", or "diamond"). Hence the new school of Buddhism was called *Vajrayāna*, "the Vehicle of the Thunderbolt".

Even the Sthaviravādins taught that the monk who reached a high stage of detachment and mental training acquired supernatural powers. At all times there were free-lance Buddhist monks, who did not live regularly in monasteries under orthodox discipline, and who attempted feats of sorcery and necromancy, such as the Buddha is said to have condemned. It was perhaps among these free-lances that the ideas of the new Vehicle developed, to be codified and given dignity under the Pāla kings of Bengal and Bihār. Even in the 7th century Hsüan Tsang found certain monasteries permeated with magical practices.

The chief divinities of the new sect were the "Saviouresses" (*Tārās*), the spouses of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. There were also a host of lesser divinities, many called by the names of demons, such as "outcaste women" (*mātaṅgīs*), "demonesses" (*piśācīs*), "sorceresses" (*yoginīs*), and "she-ghouls" (*ḍākinīs*). The Buddhas and Bodhisattvas with their Tārās were approximated to the less amiable members of the Hindu pantheon, and were often depicted with many arms in ferocious poses.

As in the days of the *Brāhmaṇas*, it was thought that these deities should be compelled rather than persuaded. The textbooks outlining the means (*sādhana*) of doing this were called *Tantras*, and hence the new cult is often referred to as tantric. By pronouncing the right formula (*mantra*) in the correct manner, or by drawing the correct magical symbol (*yantra*), one might force the gods to bestow

magical power on the worshipper and lead him to the highest bliss. Among the many formulæ of tantric Buddhism one is specially famous—the "Six Syllables" (*Ṣaḍakṣarā*), *Ōm maṇi padme hūm*, still written and repeated thousands of times daily in Tibet. This phrase: "Ah! the jewel is indeed in the lotus!", may be sexual in its original significance, mystically repeating the divine coitus of the heavenly Buddha and Prajñāpāramitā, and of Avalokiteśvara and his Tārā.

Tantric Buddhism did not neglect the techniques of mental training which were part of all the chief religions of India, but their direction was altered. Their primary purpose now was to obtain supernormal power. The meditations of the Vajrayāna were often positively psychopathic. The practitioner of the system might so hypnotize himself as to imagine that he was reborn from the womb of a Tārā, to kill his father the Buddha and take his place. In sexual union with a female devotee he and his partner would become Buddha and Tārā, or he himself might become Tārā. In the sexual rites of tantric Buddhism all taboos were lifted. Even incest was permitted, for what was sin to the ignorant was virtue to the initiate, and so as well as ritual copulation meat and alcohol were indulged in at the tantric covens. These things were, however, done under strict control, and only by initiates at sacred ceremonies. Like the Bengali tantricist of later times the Vajrayāna initiate might in his ordinary life be a normal man, whose occasional religious debauchery served as a catharsis to his evil psychological propensities and was of real help to him in leading the good life as he understood it.

The Buddhist Order

Membership of the Buddhist Order was not restricted by caste, but slaves, soldiers, debtors, and other persons under obligation or in tutelage might not enter it without the permission of their superior. Novices might be admitted from the age of eight upwards, but they could only qualify for full membership of the Order after a long course of study, at the minimum age of twenty. The rites of admission were simple, involving putting on the three yellow or orange robes of the Order, ceremonially shaving the head, and pronouncing the Three Jewels (p. 275) and the "Ten Precepts". The latter form a sort of Buddhist decalogue:

(1) "I accept the precept to refrain from harming living beings.
(2) "I accept the precept to refrain from taking what is not given.
(3) ". . . from evil behaviour in passion.
(4) ". . . from false speech.

(5) "... from *surā*, *meraya* and *majjā* (alcoholic drinks), which cause carelessness.
(6) "... from eating at forbidden times (i.e. after midday).
(7) "... from dancing, singing, music and dramatic performances.
(8) "... from the use of garlands, perfumes, unguents and jewellery.
(9) "... from the use of a high or broad bed.
(10) "... from receiving gold and silver."

These precepts were not lifelong vows, but earnest resolves. They were repeated regularly, and if any monk felt that he could no longer honestly maintain them he might leave the Order quite freely, though public opinion tended to frown on the backslider. The vows were often taken for a definite duration only, as is still done in Burma, where boys on leaving school often spend some months in a monastery in preparation for adult life. In this the Buddhist Order sharply contrasts with Christian monasticism.

Of the ten vows the first did not originally involve complete vegetarianism, though it came to do so in many Buddhist communities. A monk might eat meat if the animal providing it was not specially killed for his benefit. The third vow, for the monk, meant absolute celibacy. The fifth was generally taken to mean abstention from all intoxicants. By the sixth, a monk might eat no solid food after midday; this, in a warm climate and for a man not engaged in strenuous work, was no very great hardship, especially as the monk might take sweetened beverages at any time. In colder climates, such as that of Tibet, monks often take an evening meal, which is looked on as medicine. The seventh rule was not taken to include singing and music for liturgical or other religious purposes. The tenth was interpreted very liberally in many monasteries. Strictly a monk might own only eight "requisites"—three robes, a waist-cloth, an alms-bowl, a razor, a needle, and a cloth to strain his drinking-water in order to save the lives of any animalculæ it might contain. In fact he often owned much more than this by the convenient fiction, not unknown in some Christian religious communities, that his property belonged to the Order, from which he had it on loan.

The monk had to beg his food from door to door every morning, taking it back to his monastery for his midday meal. As the monasteries became wealthy, however, the begging round was often reduced to a mere formality, or dropped altogether.

While the Buddhist monk resembled his Christian counterpart in his vows of chastity and poverty, he took no vow of obedience. Each novice or junior monk had his preceptor, and was expected to treat him with great respect, but the monk was essentially a free member of a community of free men. There was no central authority to

regulate the many monasteries and enforce uniformity; each was a law unto itself, guided only by the precepts of the Master as it had received them and as it interpreted them. The constitution of the monastery had elements of democracy about it. The chief monk or abbot was not appointed from above or nominated by his predecessor, but held office by the suffrage of all the monks in the monastic parish. The day-to-day business of the monastery was managed by a committee of elder monks, and significant decisions, such as the admission or expulsion of members, could only be made by the committee and not by the chief. Important business was discussed at meetings of the whole monastery in chapter (p. 98).

The monks assembled every fortnight on the evenings of the full and new moons for *upavasatha* (in Pāli, *uposatha*), an act of general confession. The long list of monastic rules (*Prātimokṣa*, in Pāli *Pātimokkha*) from the *Vinaya Piṭaka* was read, and each monk confessed any breaches of which he had been guilty during the preceding fortnight. If his fault was serious his case was referred to a committee of elders, which might impose penance or expel him from the Order. The ceremony concluded with the preaching of sermons, to which the pious layfolk of the vicinity listened.

The daily life of the monk was chiefly spent in study and religious exercises, but he was expected to take his share in the work of the monastery, cleaning his cell, and sweeping the courtyard and the monastic buildings, while the elder monks devoted much of their time to teaching the novices. Among the most important of the monk's spiritual exercises were the Four Sublime Moods (*Brahmavihāra*), in which, sitting quietly cross-legged, he endeavoured to fill his mind with the four cardinal virtues of Buddhism—love, pity, joy, and serenity—and to consider all living beings in the light of these virtues. A fifth mood was that of impurity, in which he considered all the vileness and horror of the world and of the life of the flesh. For those more advanced in sanctity there were more exalted meditations, which brought the monk very near to the realization of Nirvāṇa.

One aspect of the monk's mental discipline which deserves mention is the seventh element of the "Noble Eightfold Path" (p. 271)—"Right Recollection". He was taught to train himself to be continually aware of what he was doing, observing himself, as it were, all the time. It was taught that every act must be fully conscious, and distraction, carelessness and lack of consideration were serious faults. When he ate, the monk should be aware of the nature of the act, its purpose, and the transience of the body which he fed, and similarly with every act throughout the day. No doubt few but the most

advanced monks were able to keep up this state of "Right Recollection" continuously.

At one time India possessed numerous Buddhist nunneries, though now monastic life in Buddhism is largely confined to men, except in Tibet. The nuns wore yellow robes and shaved their heads like the monks, and their discipline was very similar. Though strict rules were laid down for preserving the respectability of the two branches of the Order, which often dwelt in adjoining establishments, accusations of immorality were sometimes levelled against them by their religious opponents, and these accusations may have had some foundation. The sexual activity of tantric Buddhism, of course, did not constitute a breach of the vows when performed in accordance with the rites of the sect.

Buddhist Ethics and Morality

Buddhism inculcates a high system of ethics. The Noble Eightfold Path, whereby a man attains Nirvāṇa, is not merely a matter of belief or knowledge, but also one of conduct, and the Four Cardinal Virtues of Buddhism (p. 285) are more positive in character than the non-violence and abstinence of the Upaniṣads.

The chief of these virtues, love (Pāli, *mettā*, Sanskrit, *maitrī*), is somewhat less tinged with emotion than the comparable virtue in Christianity. The term is derived from the word *mitra*, "a friend", and might be translated "friendliness", "good will" or "benevolence". Nevertheless the Buddhist scriptures contain passages which describe *mettā* with a passion which recalls the famous words of St. Paul on the virtue of charity.

"May every living being, weak or strong, large or small, seen or unseen, near or far, born or yet unborn—may every living thing be full of joy.

"May none deceive another, or think ill of him in any way whatever, or in anger or ill-will desire evil for another.

"Just as a mother, as long as she lives, cares for her only child, so should a man feel all-embracing love to all living beings.

"He should feel boundless love for all the world, above below and across, unrestrained, without enmity. Standing, walking, sitting or lying down, . . . he should be firm in the mindfulness of love. For this is what men call the Sublime Mood."[45]

In this connexion the following extract is interesting, for it recalls a well-known verse of the Sermon on the Mount.

"A man buries a treasure in a deep pit, thinking: 'It will be useful in time of need, or if the king is displeased with me, or if I am robbed or fall into debt, or if food is scarce, or if bad luck befalls me.'

"But all this treasure may not profit the owner at all, for he may forget where he hid it, or goblins may steal it, or his enemies or even his kinsmen may take it when he is not on his guard.

"But by charity, goodness, restraint and self-control man and woman alike can store up a well-hidden treasure—a treasure which cannot be given to others,* and which robbers cannot steal. A wise man should do good—that is the treasure which will not leave him."[46]

Though the passages quoted above cannot be dated with precision they are certainly pre-Christian, and there is no possibility of Christian influence.

The vow of the Bodhisattva, which we have already quoted (p. 277f), gives sufficient indication of the ethics of the Great Vehicle, which teaches an impassioned altruism scarcely to be found elsewhere in the literature of the non-Christian world.

Though the Buddhist virtue of *mettā* seems often rather a state of mind than a spur to benevolent action, the view that faith without works is dead is sometimes expressed, notably in the story of the Buddha and the sick monk. As the Master was going on a round of inspection, visiting the monks in their cells, he found one who was sick with dysentery, and who had fallen from his bed and lay in his own ordure. With his own hands the Buddha washed the sick man from head to foot, laid him comfortably on his bed, and gave a new rule to the Order:

"Brethren, you have no mother or father to care for you. If you do not care for one another who else will do so? Brethren, he who would care for me should care for the sick."[47]

Though this precept applies primarily to the Order of monks, it was no doubt under the influence of such teachings that Aśoka established free dispensaries, and that Buddhist monks have at all times studied medical lore, and treated laymen as well as their own fellows.

The Buddhist scriptures were chiefly written for and addressed to the monks and nuns of the order, but a number of passages gave special instruction to the layman, and the first five of the "Ten Precepts" (p. 283f) were binding on the lay community. According to the first of these no Buddhist could follow the profession of hunter or butcher. The resolve not to take life was generally interpreted as permitting lawful warfare and the sentencing of criminals to death, and did not preclude Buddhists from eating meat, if provided by

* The doctrine of the Sthaviravādin School. In the Great Vehicle merit can be transferred (p. 277).

non-Buddhist butchers. But Buddhism tended to encourage mildness and vegetarianism, and somewhat discouraged the militarism which prevailed at most periods in ancient India (p. 123f). The second precept, not to take what is not given, included abstention not only from theft, but also from sharp practice in business.

For the laymen the third precept did not, of course, involve absolute celibacy, but permitted lawful marriage. It was usually interpreted as forbidding unnatural sexuality and extra-marital relations. Buddhism laid down no hard and fast rules on the questions of marriage and divorce, and at the present day in Buddhist countries marital laws are largely influenced by local custom. The fourth precept, forbidding false speech, was taken to include lying, perjury and slander, while the fifth forbade alcoholic drinks. Modern Buddhists often put a rather liberal interpretation on this rule, and the same may have been done in ancient days, for in one sermon the Buddha is said to have classed only the first four sins as "vices of action", and to have included drinking among the six less reprehensible "openings for the swallowing up of wealth", the others being roaming the streets at unseasonable hours, frequenting festivals, gambling, keeping bad company and idling.

This sermon, the most important Buddhist text on lay morality, is the "Address to Sigāla",[48] in which the Buddha gives instruction to a young layman on his relations with his fellow men, and on the duties of parents and children, teachers and pupils, husbands and wives, and friends. It breathes a spirit of warm affection and fellowship, not raised to an exalted spiritual level but of an everyday practical type. The text is too long to quote, and we can only summarize some of its instructions.

Husbands should respect their wives, and comply as far as possible with their requests. They should not commit adultery. They should give their wives full charge of the home, and supply them with fine clothes and jewellery as far as their means permit. Wives should be thorough in their duties, gentle and kind to the whole household, chaste, and careful in housekeeping, and they should carry out their work with skill and enthusiasm.

A man should be generous to his friends, speak kindly of them, act in their interests in every way possible, treat them as his equals, and keep his word to them. They in turn should watch over his interests and property, take care of him when he is "off his guard" (i.e. intoxicated, infatuated, or otherwise liable to commit rash and careless actions), stand by him and help him in time of trouble, and respect other members of his family.

Employers should treat their servants and workpeople decently. They should not be given tasks beyond their strength. They should receive adequate food and wages, be cared for in time of sickness and infirmity, and be given regular holidays and bonuses in times of prosperity. They should rise early and go to bed late in the service of their master, be content with their just wages, work thoroughly, and maintain their master's reputation.

Precepts such as these, which are implicit in the teaching of other religions, are nowhere else so clearly and unequivocally expressed. Specially noteworthy are the duties of husbands to wives and of masters to servants, which seem to anticipate twentieth century ideas on the rights of women and employees.

Among the most important vehicles of Buddhist ethical teaching are the Jātaka stories. These are mostly of secular origin, and many merely inculcate shrewdness and caution in everyday life, as do Æsop's fables (e.g. that given in full on p. 456f). Others teach generosity and self-abnegation in morbidly exaggerated forms, for instance the tale of King Śivi (known also in Hinduism), who ransomed a pigeon from a famished hawk with flesh cut from his own thigh. Many modern readers may well find the very popular story of Prince Viśvāntara (Pāli, Vessantara) distasteful. This prince gave away so much of his royal father's treasure that he was banished with his wife and children in a carriage drawn by four horses. As he left, he gave away the carriage and horses for the asking, and settled in a hut in the forest with his family. Soon he gave his children to a wandering ascetic who needed them to do his begging for him, and finally he disposed of his wife in similar manner. But all ended happily, for those who had asked him for his most precious possessions were gods in disguise who had decided to test his generosity, and he was at last restored to his family and his patrimony (pl. XIX). But many old Buddhist stories are of the highest ethical quality, such as that of the monkey who saved the lives of his fellows from the king's archers at the risk of his own by making himself a living bridge over the Gangā, or that of the noble parrot who laid down his life for his friends in a futile attempt to quench a forest fire by drops of water scattered from his wings.

(III) JAINISM AND OTHER UNORTHODOX SECTS

Jainism

Among the many unorthodox teachers who were contemporary with the Buddha was Vardhamāna, known to his followers as *Mahāvira* ("the Great Hero"). Jainism, the "Religion of the Conquerors" (*jinas*), which he founded, had a history very different from that of Buddhism. It succeeded in establishing itself firmly, and in

some places became very influential, but it never spread beyond India. Unlike Buddhism, there were no fundamental changes and developments in Jaina doctrine. But though the history of Jainism is less interesting than that of Buddhism, and though it was never so important, it survived in the land of its birth, where it still has some two million adherents, mostly well-to-do merchants.

The legends of Vardhamāna Mahāvīra are less attractive than those of the Buddha and are even more formalized and unreliable, but as he is referred to in the Buddhist scriptures as one of the Buddha's chief opponents his historicity is beyond doubt. He was born about 540 B.C. and was the son of Siddhārtha, a chief of the clan of Jñātrikas, the associates of the Licchavis of Vaiśālī; his mother, Triśalā, was the sister of the Licchavi chief Ceṭaka, and thus, like the Buddha, he was wholly the product of the oligarchic martial clans which were a powerful political force at the time. Though he was educated as a prince, and married and had a daughter, his real interest lay in the quest for salvation. At the age of thirty, when his parents were dead, he left his home for a life of asceticism. At first he followed the practices of an ascetic group called the *Nirgranthas* ("Free from Bonds"), which had been founded some 200 years earlier by a certain Pārśva. The term Nirgrantha was later used for the members of the order which Mahāvīra founded, and Pārśva was remembered as the twenty-third of the twenty-four great teachers or *Tīrthaṅkaras* ("Ford-makers") of the Jaina faith.

For over twelve years Vardhamāna wandered from place to place, begging his food, meditating, disputing, and subjecting his body to austerities of all kinds. At first he wore a single garment which he never changed, but after thirteen months he laid this encumbrance aside, and the rest of his life was spent in complete nudity. For some six years his hardships were shared by another ascetic, Gośāla Maskarīputra, but ultimately the two quarrelled, and Gośāla left Vardhamāna to found the sect of Ājīvikas.

In the thirteenth year of his asceticism Vardhamāna found full enlightenment and Nirvāṇa; he became a "Worthy" (*Arhant*), a "Conqueror" (*Jina*), a "Ford-maker". He soon gained a great reputation and a large band of followers, and for thirty years he taught in the Gangetic kingdoms, patronized by the very kings who also patronized the Buddha. He survived the death of his chief rival, Gośāla, and probably also that of the Buddha, and died of self-starvation at the age of seventy-two in the little town of Pāvā, near the Magadhan capital Rājagṛha. There are conflicting traditions about the date of his death, which was probably in 468 B.C.

For some two centuries the Jainas remained a small community of

monks and lay followers, less important than the rival sect of the Ājīvikas. According to a strongly held Jaina tradition Candragupta Maurya joined their order as a monk on his abdication, and it seems certain that there was an accession of strength in Maurya times. A serious famine at the end of Candragupta's reign led to a great exodus of Jaina monks from the Gangā Valley to the Deccan, where they established important centres of their faith.

Out of this migration arose the great schism of Jainism, on a point of monastic discipline. Bhadrabāhu, the elder of the community, who led the emigrants, insisted on the retention of the rule of nudity which Mahāvīra had established. Sthūlabhadra, the leader of the monks who remained in the North, allowed his followers to wear white garments, owing to the hardships and confusions of the famine. Hence arose the two sects of the Jainas, the *Digambaras* ("Space-clad", i.e. naked), and the *Śvetāmbaras* ("White-clad"). The schism did not become final until the 1st century A.D., and there were never any fundamental doctrinal differences; later most monks of the naked sect took to wearing robes in public, but the division has persisted down to the present day.

According to tradition an oral sacred literature had been passed down from the days of Mahāvīra, but Bhadrabāhu was the last person to know it perfectly. On his death Sthūlabhadra called a great council at Pāṭaliputra, and the canon was reconstructed as best possible in twelve *Aṅgas*, or sections, which replaced the fourteen "former texts" (*Pūrvas*). This canon was accepted only by the Śvetāmbaras; the Digambaras claimed that the old canon was hopelessly lost, and proceeded to devise new scriptures for themselves, some of which are still unpublished. The texts of the Śvetāmbara canon were finally settled and reduced to writing at a council at Valabhī in Gujarāt in the 5th century A.D. By this time the texts had become very corrupt and one of the Aṅgas had been completely lost, while new material had been added to the original canon in the form of the twelve *Upāṅgas*, or minor sections, and various lesser works. In the Middle Ages a great body of commentarial literature was written both in Prākrit and Sanskrit, and there were many able philosopher monks, who interpreted the scriptures of the sect. Some monks turned their attention to secular literature and other branches of learning, apparently without losing their piety. One of the last great poets in Sanskrit, Nayacandra, of the 14th century (p. 433f), was a Jaina monk, as was Mallinātha, the author of the standard commentary on the poems of Kālidāsa. We owe much to the Jaina monks' love of literature. To copy a manuscript, even a secular one, was considered a work of great religious merit, and thus the old Jaina monasteries of

Western India have preserved many rare and otherwise unknown texts, some of which have still to be published and many of which are of non-Jaina origin.

In the period between the Mauryas and the Guptas Jainism can be traced from Orissā in the East to Mathurā in the West, but in later times it was chiefly concentrated in two regions—Gujarāt and parts of Rājasthān, where the Śvetāmbara sect prevailed, and the central part of the Peninsula, the modern Mysore, where the Digambaras were dominant. The Gangā Valley, the original home of Jainism, was little affected by it.

The Śvetāmbaras found much support among the chiefs of Western India, and gained a position of great prominence during the reign of the Caulukya king Kumārapāla, who ruled Gujarāt in the 12th century. Under the guidance of a great Jaina scholar, Hemacandra, Kumārapāla is said to have instituted a Jaina reformation; but on his death the sect lost much of its influence, and though it still flourished it never again became so important. Similarly in the South the Digambaras had great influence in the early Middle Ages, thanks to the patronage of kings, but this influence gradually diminished as that of devotional Śaivism and Vaiṣṇavism grew. There are traditions, which some have doubted but which we believe to have a basis of fact, that the Jainas were sometimes severely persecuted. But although Jainism declined it never disappeared.

Though the Jaina scriptures are comparatively late in their final form, there is little divergence in fundamentals between the two great Jaina sects; thus it seems that the basic teachings of both are very ancient indeed, and are essentially those of Mahāvīra himself. Jainism, like Buddhism, is fundamentally atheistic in that, while not denying the existence of the gods, it refuses them any important part in the universal scheme. The world, for the Jaina, is not created, maintained or destroyed by a personal deity, but functions only according to universal law.

The universe is eternal. Its existence is divided into an infinite number of cycles, each consisting of a period of improvement (*utsarpiṇī*), and one of decline (*avasarpiṇī*). Each period is to all intents and purposes like the last, containing twenty-four *Tīrthaṅkaras*, twelve Universal Emperors (*Cakravartins*), both classes being included in the total of sixty-three Great Men (*Śālāka-puruṣas*), who live at regular intervals in the cycle. At the peak period men are of enormous size and reach a tremendous age. They have no need of laws or property, for wishing-trees (*kalpa-vṛkṣa*) give them all they need for the asking. At present the world is rapidly declining. The last Tīrthaṅkara of this age has passed to final Nirvāṇa, and gradually

true religion will be lost—Mahāvīra in his omniscience even gave his followers the name and addr of the last Jaina of this æon. The process of decline will continue for 40,000 years, when men will be dwarfs in stature, with a life of only twenty years, and will dwell in caves, having forgotten all culture, even to the use of fire. Then the tide will turn, and they will begin to improve again, only to decline once more, and so on for all eternity. Unlike the cosmology of the Buddhists and Hindus, that of the Jainas involves no cataclysms of universal destruction.

The universe functions through the interaction of living souls (*jīvas*, literally "lives"), and five categories of non-living entities (*ajīva*): "ether" (*ākāśa*), the means or condition of movement (*dharma*), the means or condition of rest (*adharma*),* time (*kāla*), and matter (*pudgala*). Souls are not only the property of animal and plant life, but also of entities such as stones, rocks, running water, and many other natural objects not looked on as living by other sects.

The soul is naturally bright, all-knowing and blissful. There are an infinite number of souls in the universe, all fundamentally equal, but differing owing to the adherence of matter in a fine atomic form. This subtle matter, quite invisible to the human eye, is *karma*, the immaterial entity of other systems interpreted materialistically. The naturally bright soul becomes dulled and clouded over by karmic matter and thus acquires first a spiritual and then a material body. The obfuscation of the soul is compared to the gradual clouding of a bright oily surface by motes of dust. Karma adheres to the soul as a result of activity. Any and every activity induces karma of some kind, but deeds of a cruel and selfish nature induce more, and more durable, karma than others. The karma already acquired leads to the acquisition of further karma, and thus the cycle of transmigration continues indefinitely.

On these premisses transmigration can only be escaped by dispelling the karma already adhering to the soul and by ensuring that no more is acquired. This is a slow and difficult process and it is believed that many souls will never succeed in accomplishing it, but will continue to transmigrate for all eternity. The annihilation (*nirjarā*) of karma comes about through penance, and the prevention (*saṃvara*) of the influx (*āśrava*) and fixation (*bandha*)† of karma in the soul is ensured by carefully disciplined conduct, as a result of which it does not

* Like the Buddhists the Jainas gave to these familiar terms very special connotations, the full discussion of which is beyond the scope of this work. *Dharma* is a sort of secondary space which permits movement, as water permits a fish to swim; *adharma* is a tertiary space which permits rest.

† We quote these four Sanskrit terms as, with *jīva* (souls), *ajīva* (the five categories mentioned earlier), and salvation (*mokṣa*), they constitute the seven fundamental categories (*tattva*) of Jainism.

enter in dangerous quantities and is dispersed immediately. When the soul has finally set itself free it rises at once above the highest heaven to the top of the universe, where it remains in inactive omniscient bliss through all eternity. This, for the Jainas, is Nirvāṇa.

Though Jaina philosophers developed their doctrines, and evolved a theory of epistemology of great subtlety (p. 504f) and a remarkable view of space and time suggesting the world picture of relativity physics, their fundamental teachings remained essentially unaltered. Mahāvīra and the twenty-three other Tīrthaṅkaras were adored in the same way as the Buddha and the Hindu gods, but Jainism never compromised in its atheism, and there was no development in this sect comparable to the Great Vehicle in Buddhism. Jainism has survived for over 2,000 years on the basis of these austere teachings alone.

Full salvation is not possible to the layman. In this Jainism differs from Buddhism and Hinduism, which concede it in exceptional cases. To attain Nirvāṇa a man must abandon all trammels, including his clothes. Only by a long course of fasting, self-mortification, study and meditation can he rid himself of karma, and only by the most rigorous discipline can he prevent fresh karma from clinging to his soul. Hence a monastic life is essential for salvation. Very early, however, many Jaina monks gave up the rule of nudity, and today few if any monks, even of the Digambara sect, practise it regularly. Both sects of Jainas, however, would admit that it is necessary to full liberation. The universe is now rapidly declining, and no souls now reach Nirvāṇa or have any hope of reaching it in the foreseeable future, so in these degenerate days clothes are worn as a concession to human frailty.

The regimen of the Jaina monk was, and still is, strict in the extreme. At his initiation his hair was not shaved, but pulled out by the roots. He subjected himself to many hardships, such as meditating in the full sunlight of the Indian summer, or maintaining an uneasy posture for long periods on end, though Jainism did not permit the more spectacular penances of some Hindu ascetics. The monk's frugal meals were interrupted by numerous fasts, and many monks starved themselves to death, following the example of Mahāvīra himself.

The life of the monk was governed by five vows, abjuring killing, stealing, lying, sexual activity and the possession of property. These vows were interpreted quite strictly. Acts of violence and killing, whether intentional or not, were the most potent cause of the influx of karma, and were therefore particularly to be avoided. Meat-eating was quite forbidden to monk and layman alike. Even insect life was carefully protected. Like the Buddhist monks, the Jainas strained their drinking-water to save the lives of animalculæ. Jaina monks

usually carried feather dusters, to brush ants and other insects from their path and save them from being trampled underfoot, and they wore veils over their mouths, to prevent the minute living things in the air from being inhaled and killed. No lay Jaina could take up the profession of agriculture, since this involved not only the destruction of plant life, but also of many living beings in the soil itself. Kindling a light or fire was not permitted by the monk, since it destroyed lives both in the fuel and in the surrounding air, while putting a fire out was also forbidden, since it destroyed the life of the fire itself. Thus, in its insistence on ahiṃsā, or non-violence, Jainism went much further than any other Indian religion.

It has been suggested that Jainism survived in India, whereas Buddhism perished, because the former sect took better care of its layfolk. In Jainism the layman was a definite member of the Order, encouraged to undertake periodical retreats and to live as far as possible the life of the monk for specific periods. Like Buddhism, Jainism encouraged the commercial virtues of honesty and frugality, and at a very early period the Jaina lay community became predominantly mercantile. The splendid Jaina temples at such places as Mount Ābū and Śravaṇa Belgoḷā are testimonies of the great wealth and piety of medieval Jaina laymen.

Jainism had no special social doctrines. The domestic rites of the layman, such as birth, marriage and death, were those of the Hindus. At one time Jainism maintained a cult of stūpas in the same way as Buddhism, but this has not survived, and early in the Christian era the Tīrthaṅkaras were adored in temples in the form of icons. By the Middle Ages this worship approximated to that of the Hindus, with offerings of flowers, incense, lamps and so on. As with Buddhism, the chief gods of the Hindus found their way into Jaina temples in subordinate positions, and though there was no real compromise with theism the sect easily fitted into the Hindu order, its members forming distinct castes.

Jaina religious literature is generally dull and pedantic, and its ethics, though they inculcate such virtues as honesty and mercy, tend to be negative and fundamentally selfish. The virtue of non-violence in Jainism often had little of love about it, but merely involved vegetarianism and precautions against the accidental killing of small animals. There are, however, passages in the Jaina scriptures which show warmth and human sympathy. Thus, discussing the doctrine of non-violence, the early *Ācārāṅga Sūtra* writes:

"A wise man should be neither glad nor angry, for he should know and consider the happiness of all things. . . . Life is dear to the many who own

fields and houses, who get dyed and coloured clothes and jewels and earrings, and grow attached to them. . . . Only those who are of controlled conduct do not desire these things; therefore, knowing birth and death, you should firmly walk the path.

"For nothing is inaccessible to death, and all beings are fond of themselves, they love pleasure and hate pain, they shun destruction and cling to life. They long to live. To all things life is dear."[49]

More typical of Jaina moral teachings are the following verses, said to have been spoken by Mahāvīra to Gautama, one of his disciples (not, of course, to be confused with Gautama the Buddha).

" As the dead leaf when its time is up
falls from the tree to the ground,
so is the life of man.
Gautama, always be watchful!

"As the dewdrop that sways on a blade of grass
lasts but a moment,
so is the life of man.
Gautama, always be watchful!

"For the soul which suffers for its carelessness
is whirled about in the universe,
through good and evil karma.
Gautama, always be watchful!

"When the body grows old and the hair turns white,
and all the vital powers decrease . . .
despondency and disease befall, and the flesh wastes and decays
Gautama, always be watchful!

"So cast away all attachments,
and be pure as a lotus, or as water in autumn.
Free from every attachment,
Gautama, always be watchful!"[50]

As an example of Digambara teaching we give a few verses, remarkable for their conciseness, by the 4th century monk Pūjyapāda.

"Body, house, wealth and wife,
sons and friends and enemies—
all are different from the soul.
Only the fool thinks them his own."

. . . .

"From all directions come the birds
and rest together in the trees;
but in the morning each goes his own way,
flying in all directions."

. . . .

"Death is not for me. Why then should I fear?
Disease is not for me. Why then should I despair?
I am not a child, nor a youth, nor an old man—
All these states are only of my body."

. . . .

"Time and again in my foolishness I have enjoyed
all kinds of body and have discarded them.
Now I am wise!
Why should I long for rubbish?"

. . . .

"The soul is one thing, matter another—
that is the quintessence of truth.
Whatever else may be said
is merely its elaboration."[51]

The Ājivikas

A third unorthodox sect which emerged at the same time as Buddhism and Jainism was that of the Ājīvikas, a body of ascetics who were under a rigorous discipline similar to that of the Jainas, and who also practised complete nudity. The doctrines of the founder of the sect, Gośāla Maskarīputra, bear a generic likeness to those of his contemporary and former friend Mahāvīra. Like Mahāvīra, he looked back to earlier teachers and ascetic groups, whose doctrines he refurbished and developed. According to both Buddhist and Jaina tradition he was of humble birth; he died a year or so before the Buddha, about 487 B.C., after a fierce altercation with Mahāvīra in the city of Śrāvastī. His followers seem to have combined with those of other teachers, such as Pūraṇa Kāśyapa the antinomian and Pakudha Kātyāyana the atomist, to form the Ājīvika sect. After a period of prosperity in Mauryan times, when Aśoka and his successor Daśaratha presented caves to the Ājīvikas, the sect rapidly declined, and only retained some local importance in a small region of Eastern Mysore and the adjacent parts of Madras, where it survived until the 14th century, after which we hear no more of it.

No scriptures of the Ājīvikas have come down to us, and the little we know about them has to be reconstructed from the polemic literature of Buddhism and Jainism. The sect was certainly atheistic, and its main feature was strict determinism. The usual doctrine of karma taught that though a man's present condition was determined by his past actions he could influence his destiny, in this life and the future, by choosing the right course of conduct. This the Ājīvikas denied. The whole universe was conditioned and determined to the smallest detail by an impersonal cosmic principle, *Niyati*, or destiny. It was impossible to influence the course of transmigration in any way.

"All that have breath, all that are born, all that have life, are without power, strength or virtue, but are developed by destiny, chance and nature, and experience joy and sorrow in the six classes [of existence]. There are . . . 8,400,000 great æons (*mahākappa*), through which fool and wise alike must take their course and make an end of sorrow. There is no [question of] bringing unripe karma to fruition, nor of exhausting karma already ripened, by virtuous conduct, by vows, by penance, or by chastity. That cannot be done. Saṃsāra is measured as with a bushel, with its joy and sorrow and its appointed end. It can neither be lessened nor increased, nor is there any excess or deficiency of it. Just as a ball of string will, when thrown, unwind to its full length, so fool and wise alike will take their course, and make an end [illegible]ow."[52]

Though nothing that a man could do would in any way influence his future lot Ājīvika monks practised severe asceticism, because the force of destiny compelled them to do so, although their religious opponents accused them of licentiousness and immorality.

The Dravidian Ājīvikas developed their doctrines in a way resembling Buddhism of the Great Vehicle. Gośāla became an ineffable divinity, like the Buddha in the Mahāyāna system, while the doctrine of destiny evolved into a Parmenidean view that all change and movement were illusory, and that the world was in reality eternally and immovably at rest. This view bears a certain resemblance to Nāgārjuna's doctrine of "the Void".

Scepticism and Materialism

Buddha, Mahāvīra, Gośāla, and many lesser teachers of their period ignored the gods, but they were not thoroughgoing atheists and materialists. All admitted the existence of supernatural beings of strictly limited powers, and all accepted the fundamental doctrine of transmigration, though they interpreted its mechanics individually. Some thinkers, however, rejected all immaterial categories completely, and their influence may have been wider than appears from the religious texts of the period. In the fairly early *Kaṭha Upaniṣad* the interlocutor Naciketas (p. 158) questions Yama, the god of death, in these terms: "There is doubt about the state of a man who is dead —some say he is, others, he is not." "On this point", Yama replies, "even the gods formerly had their doubts. It is not easy to understand." At this time unbelief must have been fairly widespread.

Ajita Keśakambalin ("Ajita of the Hair-blanket", no doubt so called from the garb of his order), a contemporary of the Buddha, was the earliest known teacher of complete materialism.

"Man," he said, "is formed of the four elements. When he dies earth returns to the aggregate of earth, water to water, fire to fire, and air to air, while his senses vanish into space. Four men with the bier take up the

[illegible] gossip [about the dead man] as far as the burning-ground, [illegible] turn the colour of a dove's wing and his sacrifices end in [illegible] are fools who preach almsgiving, and those who maintain the [illegible] immaterial categories] speak vain and lying nonsense. When [illegible] both fool and wise alike are cut off and perish. They do not [illegible] after death."[53]

If we are to believe the Buddhist scriptures, Ajita founded a sect of [illegible]. The Buddha condemned them as having no good motive for [illegible] asceticism, the degree of which is nowhere made clear. It is [illegible] that, like the Epicureans, they were not [illegible] much an [illegible] order as a fraternity of men with common aim, cultivating [illegible] the simpler pleasures of life. In any case, [illegible] element of materialism is traceable in Indian thought from this time onwards. Religious and philosophical literature, whether Hindu, Buddhist or Jaina, devotes much space to attacking the evil tenets of the *Cārvākas* or *Lokayatas*, as the materialist schools were called. Throughout the period which we treat these unbelievers are referred to with scorn and disapprobation which sometimes seems to contain an undertone of fear, as though the pious authors thought it really possible that the materialists might shake the foundations of the established order. Materialist and irreligious undercurrents are traceable in some secular literature, such as the *Arthaśāstra* and the *Kāmasūtra*.

The general attitude of the materialist schools, according to their adversaries, was that all religious observance and morality were futile. A man should make the most of life and get what happiness he could out of it. The frugal virtues of Buddhism and Jainism were rejected.

"As long as he lives a man should live happily
and drink ghee, though he run into debt,
for when the body is turned to ashes
how can there be any return to life?"[54]

A man must not turn back from pleasure for fear of concomitant sorrow. He must accept occasional sorrow gladly, for the sake of the joy which he finds in the world, as he accepts the bones with the fish or the husk with the corn. "Whoever turns in fear from the joy that he sees before him is a fool, no better than an animal."[55]

Their opponents ascribe only base ideals to the materialists, and there is no definite evidence that they had any ethical doctrines, but one verse attributed to them shows that they were not blind to the warm ties of family and friendship.

"If a man really left his body,
and passed on to the other world,
would he not come back once more,
drawn by his love for his kin?"[56]

Besides numerous quotations attributed to materialists in religious and philosophical works one anti-religious philosophical text has survived. This is the *Tattvopaplavasiṃha* (freely "The Lion Destroying all Religious Truth") written by a certain Jayarāśi in the 8th century A.D. The author was an out-and-out Pyrrhonist denying the possibility of any certain knowledge at all, and he demolished with able dialectic, to his own satisfaction at any rate, all the basic presuppositions of the chief religious systems of his day.

(IV) HINDUISM

Development and Literature

As well as the aristocratic religion of the brāhmaṇs, the Buddhist and Jaina scriptures mention popular cults, connected with earth-spirits (*yakṣas*), snake-spirits (*nāgas*), and other minor deities, centred round sacred spots or caityas (p. 264). Very early a god named Vāsudeva was widely worshipped, especially in Western India. It was to this god that the Besnagar column, to which we have more than once referred, was erected. The inscription on the column shows that by the end of the 2nd century B.C. the cult of Vāsudeva was receiving the support of the ruling classes, and even of the Western invaders. Soon after this Vāsudeva was identified with the Vedic god Viṣṇu, if indeed the identification had not already been made, and further syncretisms were taking place. Nārāyaṇa, a god of obscure origin mentioned in the Brāhmaṇa literature, was also identified with Viṣṇu, whose name was by now closely connected with that of Kṛṣṇa, one of the heroes of the martial traditions which were brought together to form the great epic, the *Mahābhārata*.

The character of Viṣṇu, and those of the gods associated with him, developed through the centuries, as further popular divinities were in one way or another identified with him. Among some of the lower orders theriomorphic cults prevailed, especially in parts of Mālwā, where a divinity in the form of a boar was worshipped. By Gupta times the cult of the divine boar was assimilated to that of Viṣṇu. A pastoral flute-playing deity, popular among herdsmen and of uncertain origin, was identified with the hero Kṛṣṇa, by now recognized as an incarnation of Viṣṇu. The Brāhmaṇic hero Paraśurāma was similarly accounted for, while later Rāma, the hero of the second great Indian epic, was also brought into the Vaiṣṇavite pantheon.

Simultaneously a fertility deity, whose cult may have been kept alive in non-brāhmaṇic circles from the days of the Harappā culture, rose in prominence. This was Śiva, identified with the Vedic Rudra and usually worshipped in the form of the phallic emblem (*liṅga*).

With Śiva were later associated certain other popular divinities, such as Skanda and the elephant-headed Gaṇeśa. At the end of the Gupta period goddesses rose to prominence, together with magical cults, religious sexuality, and a new form of animal sacrifice, which increased in importance throughout the early Middle Ages.

The final form of Hinduism was largely the result of influence from the Dravidian South. Here, on the basis of indigenous cults fertilized by Āryan influences, theistic schools had arisen, characterized by intense ecstatic piety. It was this devotional religion, propagated by many wandering preachers and hymn-singers in the medieval period, which had the greatest effect on Hinduism as it exists today.

During this period an enormous body of sacred literature was produced. The Vedas, Brāhmaṇas and Upaniṣads, theoretically still the most sacred of all India's religious literature, were studied only by those who had undergone the ceremony of initiation, and became more and more the preserve of the brāhmaṇs, who themselves often interpreted them figuratively in the light of the new doctrines. The real scriptures of Hinduism, as distinct from Brāhmaṇism, were available to all, even to men of low caste and to women. These were the Epics, the *Purāṇas*, the books of Sacred Law, which we have treated elsewhere (p. 113), and numerous hymns and religious poems. For the learned there was a voluminous literature of commentaries, and many treatises were written on various aspects of theology and philosophy.

The two great Epics were originally secular, and in their literary aspect will be treated later (p. 409ff). Very early, probably well before the Christian era, the *Mahābhārata* began to receive religious interpolations and to be looked on as a sacred text. The most important of these interpolations is the famous *Bhagavad Gītā*, itself a compilation of material from various sources, to which we shall often refer in the course of this chapter; and much literature on the Sacred Law, as well as religious legends of many kinds, has found its way into the Epic which, as it exists at present, forms an encyclopedia of early Hinduism. An important appendix to the *Mahābhārata* is the *Harivaṃśa*, giving the legend of the god Kṛṣṇa in a developed form. The second epic, the *Rāmāyaṇa*, was also at first secular, but at a comparatively late period, possibly after the age of the Guptas, an introductory and a final canto were added, together with other interpolations, which raised the text to the status of a sacred scripture.

The Purāṇas ("Ancient Stories") are compendia of legends and religious instructions. There are eighteen chief Purāṇas, of which perhaps the most important are the *Vāyu*, *Viṣṇu*, *Agni*, *Bhaviṣya* and *Bhāgavata Purāṇas*. In their present form they are not very ancient,

none going back earlier than the Gupta period and all containing interpolations, but most of their legendary material is very old indeed.

Much later religious poetry is of small literary value, and has little more sanctity than have "Hymns Ancient and Modern" in the Church of England. Certain poems, however, became very sacred in later Hinduism, notably the *Gīta Govinda*, a collection of interlinked religious songs by the 12th-century Bengali poet Jayadeva (p. 430f). Some medieval *stotras* or hymns of praise, such as those attributed to the theologian Śaṅkara, have considerable literary merit, and are looked on with great respect.

The Peninsula produced much vernacular sacred poetry during our period, some of which is of great value, and is considered to be very holy. A beautiful collection of moral aphorisms in Tamil verse, the *Tirukkuṛaḷ* ("Sacred Couplets"), attributed to Tiruvaḷḷuvar, perhaps dates from the 4th or 5th centuries A.D., though some authorities would put it much earlier. Later, from the 7th to the 10th centuries, were composed the eleven sacred books (*Tirumuṛai*) of the Tamil Śaivites, anthologies of hymns by the sixty-three *Nāyaṉārs*, or Teachers. Chief of these eleven works are the *Tēvāram*, containing songs by the three poets Appar, Ñānasambandar, and Sundaramūrti, and the *Tiruvāśagam* of Māṇikka Vāśagar. The Tamil Vaiṣṇavites at about the same period produced the *Nālāyiram* ("Four Thousand"), a collection of stanzas attributed to the twelve *Āḻvārs* or saints of the sect. Similar collections of devotional poetry, still looked on locally as very holy, were composed at the end of our period in Canarese and Telugu. At a later time much devotional literature was written in the Āryan vernaculars, but none survives from the period before the Muslim invasions, except perhaps the works of some of the Marāthā Vaiṣṇavite hymn singers, Jñāneśvar, Nāmdev and a few others, who, according to tradition, lived at the end of the 13th century.

We cannot here catalogue the great mass of religio-philosophical literature of Hinduism, some of which will be mentioned in the following pages.

Viṣṇu

To the Vaiṣṇavite, the devotee of Viṣṇu, this god is the source of the universe and of all things. According to the most famous cosmic myth of Hinduism he sleeps in the primeval ocean, on the thousand-headed snake Śeṣa. In his sleep a lotus grows from his navel, and in the lotus is born the demiurge Brahmā,* who creates

* Not to be confused with the impersonal Brahman (p. 252) of the Upaniṣads.

the world. Once the world is created Viṣṇu awakes, to reign in the highest heaven, Vaikuṇṭha. He is usually depicted as a four-armed god of dark blue colour, crowned and seated on his throne, bearing in his hands his emblems, the conch, discus, mace and lotus, wearing a costly jewel called *Kaustubha* round his neck, and with a tuft of curled hair (*Śrīvatsa*) on his chest. He rides the great eagle Garuḍa, usually shown with a half-human face, who is perhaps the survival of an ancient theriomorphic cult and who was already associated with Vāsudeva, one of Viṣṇu's early forms, when Heliodorus erected his column at Besnagar. Viṣṇu's spouse, Lakṣmī, is an important goddess in her own right.

Viṣṇu's status as the Universal God, of whom all other gods are aspects or emanations, appears as early as the *Bhagavad Gītā*.

> "Now I will tell the chief of my holy powers . . . .
> though there is no end to my fullness.
> I am the self in the inmost heart of all that are born . . . .
> I am their beginning, their middle and their end. . . .
> I am the beginning, the middle, the end, of all creation,
> the science of the soul among sciences,
> of speakers I am the speech,
> of letters I am A.*
>
> "I am unending time,
> I am the ordainer who faces all ways,
> I am destroying death,
> I am the source of all that is to be. . . .
> I am the dice-play of the gamester,
> I am the glory of the glorious,
> I am victory, I am courage,
> I am the goodness of the virtuous. . . .
> I am the force of those who govern,
> I am the statecraft of those who seek to conquer,
> I am the silence of what is secret,
> I am the knowledge of those who know,
> and I am the seed of all that is born. . . .
>
> "There is nothing that can exist without me.
> There is no end to my holy powers. . . .
> And whatever is mighty or fortunate or strong
> springs from a portion of my glory."[57]

Though his counterpart Śiva has a rather ferocious and dangerous side to his character, Viṣṇu is generally thought of as wholly benevolent. The god works continuously for the welfare of the world, and

* *A* is the first letter of the Sanskrit alphabet. It is also implicit in all the other letters, if they are not modified by special marks (p. 398).

with this in view he has from time to time incarnated himself, either wholly or partially. The earliest version of this doctrine is contained in the *Bhagavad Gītā*, wherein Kṛṣna reveals himself as the ever active godhead incarnate.

> "In essence I am never born, I never alter.
> I am the lord of all beings
> and the full master of my own nature,
> yet of my own power I come to be.
>
> "Whenever the Sacred Law fails, and evil raises its head,
> I take embodied birth.
> To guard the righteous, to root out sinners,
> and to establish the Sacred Law,
> I am born from age to age."[58]

The *Avatāras* ("Descents") or incarnations of Viṣṇu are, according to the most popular classification, ten. The divinities and heroes composing the list were adopted by Vaiṣṇavism at different times, but all were incorporated by the 11th century. It may be that the Vaiṣṇavite doctrine of incarnation owes something to the Buddhist and Jaina doctrines of former Buddhas and Tīrthaṅkaras, which are certainly attested earlier. An incarnation might be total or partial—for "whatever is mighty or fortunate or strong springs from a portion of my glory". In this sense every good or great man was thought of as a partial incarnation of Viṣṇu. The ten chief incarnations, however, are of a more special type, for in them the full essence of the god is believed to have taken flesh to save the world from imminent danger of total destruction. They are as follows:

(1) The Fish (*Matsya*). When the earth was overwhelmed by a universal flood Viṣṇu took the form of a fish, who first warned Manu (the Hindu Adam) of the impending danger, and then carried him, his family, and the seven great sages (*ṛṣis*) in a ship fastened to a horn on his head. He also saved the Vedas from the flood. The fish legend first appears in the Brāhmaṇas, and the Noah's Ark theme suggests Semitic influence. The Fish incarnation was never widely worshipped.

(2) The Tortoise (*Kūrma*). Many divine treasures were lost in the flood, including the ambrosia (*amṛta*),* with which the gods preserved their youth. Viṣṇu became a great tortoise, and dived to the bottom of the cosmic ocean. On his back the gods placed Mount Mandara, and, twining the divine snake Vāsuki around the mountain, churned the ocean in the manner in which an Indian dairyman churns

* The words ambrosia and *amṛta* are probably connected etymologically; but amṛta was a drink, and should therefore perhaps be translated "nectar".

churning the mountain by pulling the snake. From the churned ocean appeared the ambrosia and various other treasures, including the goddess Lakṣmī. The story is probably a piece of very early myth, but the identification of the tortoise with Viṣṇu is comparatively late, and, though frequently mentioned in literature, this incarnation had little real importance.

(3) The Boar (*Varāha*). A demon, Hiraṇyākṣa, cast the earth down into the depths of the cosmic ocean. Viṣṇu took the form of a monstrous boar, killed the demon, and raised the earth on his tusk (pl. XXV*d*). The legend looks back to the Brāhmaṇas, but seems developed through a primitive non-Āryan cult of a sacred animal. The cult of the Boar incarnation was important in some parts of India in Gupta times.

(4) The Man-Lion (*Narasiṃha*). Another demon, Hiraṇyakaśipu, had obtained a boon from Brahmā ensuring that he could not be killed either by day or night by god, man or beast. Thus safeguarded he persecuted gods and men, including his own pious son Prahlāda. When Prahlāda called on Viṣṇu for help the god burst from a pillar of the demon's palace at sunset, when it was neither night nor day, in a form half man and half lion, and slew Hiraṇyakaśipu. Narasiṃha was worshipped as their special divinity (*iṣṭadevatā*) by a small sect, and was often depicted in sculpture.

(5) The Dwarf (*Vāmana*). A demon named Bali gained control of the world, and commenced a course of asceticism, by which his supernatural power so increased that he menaced even the gods. Viṣṇu appeared before him in the form of a dwarf, and asked as a boon as much space as he could cover in three strides. When the boon was granted the god became a giant, and in two strides covered earth, heaven and the middle air. Magnanimously he refrained from taking the third stride, and left the infernal regions to the demon. The three steps of Viṣṇu are as old as the *Ṛg Veda*, but other popular elements were incorporated into the story.

(6) Paraśurāma ("Rāma with the Axe"). Viṣṇu took human form as the son of a brāhman Jamadagni. When his father was robbed by the wicked King Kārtavīrya, Paraśurāma killed the latter. Jamadagni was in turn killed by the sons of Kārtavīrya, after which the enraged Paraśurāma destroyed all the males of the kṣatriya class twenty-one times in succession. Though Paraśurāma is frequently referred to in literature, he seems rarely to have been specially worshipped

(7) Rāma, Prince of Ayodhyā and hero of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Viṣṇu incarnated himself in this form to save the world from the oppressions of the demon Rāvaṇa. To one who is not a Hindu his story is rather a matter of literature than of religion and it will be told in a later chapter

(p. 414ff). Rāma may have been a chief who lived in the 8th or 7th century B.C., and in the earliest form of the story he has no divine attributes. Though he was believed to be an earlier incarnation than Kṛṣṇa, his cult developed later than Kṛṣṇa's, and does not appear to have become very important until towards the end of our period. Rāma is usually depicted as of dark hue, often bearing a bow and arrow. He is attended by his faithful queen Sītā, the personification of wifely devotion, and often also by his three loyal brothers, Lakṣmaṇa, Bharata and Śatrughna, and by his friend and helper, the monkey-god Hanumant. To his devotees Rāma combines the ideals of the gentle, faithful husband, the leader brave in hardship, and the just and benevolent king. It is perhaps significant that his cult only became really popular after the Muslim invasion.

(8) Kṛṣṇa is undoubtedly the most important of the incarnations of Viṣṇu. His legend in its final form is very long and can only be outlined briefly here.

Kṛṣṇa was born at Mathurā, of the tribe of the Yādavas. His father was Vasudeva, and his mother was Devakī, the cousin of the ruling King Kaṃsa.* It was prophesied that Kaṃsa would be killed by Devakī's eighth son, so he set out to destroy all her children. But Kṛṣṇa and his elder brother Balarāma were saved, and were brought up as the sons of the cowherd Nanda and his wife Yaśodā. Kaṃsa, hearing that the boys had escaped his clutches, ordered the slaughter of all the male children in his kingdom, but Nanda smuggled the boys away, first to Vraja and then to Vṛndāvana, districts not far from Mathurā which are still very sacred to Kṛṣṇa.

In his childhood the incarnate god performed many miracles, killing demons, and sheltering the cowherds from a storm by holding Mount Govardhana over their heads with his finger; he also played numerous childish pranks, such as stealing Yaśodā's butter. In his adolescence he had many amours with the wives and daughters of the cowherds (*gopīs*), and accompanied their dances on his flute. His favourite was the beautiful Rādhā.

But his youthful days soon ended. Kaṃsa traced him and made further attempts on his life. Kṛṣṇa then gave up his idyllic pastoral ways, and turned on his wicked cousin. He slew Kaṃsa, and seized the kingdom of Mathurā, but, pressed between Kaṃsa's father-in-law, Jarāsandha king of Magadha, and an unnamed Yavana king of the North-West, he was forced to leave his kingdom, and with his followers founded a new capital at Dvārakā in Saurāshtra. Here he made Rukmiṇī, daughter of the king of Vidarbha (modern Berar), his chief queen, and amassed a total of over 16,000 wives and 180,000 sons. His adventures at this stage of his career include

* There is some ambiguity about the relationship of Kaṃsa and Kṛṣṇa, owing to the fact that Indian usage makes no sharp distinction between brothers or sisters and cousins. Hence Kaṃsa is often referred to as Kṛṣṇa's uncle, when according to strict English usage the two were second cousins.

[illegible] destruction of wicked kings and demons all over India. Throughout the [illegible] the *Mahābhārata* he appears as the constant friend and advisor of [illegible] Pāṇḍavas, and he preached the great sermon of the *Bhagavad Gītā* [illegible] before the battle which is the centre of the epic story.

[illegible] seeing the Pāṇḍavas safely installed in the Kuru land, Kṛṣṇa re[illegible]d to Dvārakā. Here ominous portents beset the city, as the Yādava [illegible] quarrelled among themselves. Kṛṣṇa banned strong drink, in the hope [illegible] staving off the evil day, but on the occasion of a festival he relaxed the [illegible]. The Yādava chiefs began to brawl, and the whole city was soon in up[illegible]. For all his divinity, Kṛṣṇa could do nothing to quell the feud, which in[illegible]ed the whole people. His son Pradyumna was killed before his eyes, [illegible] his faithful brother Balarāma wounded to death; nearly all the chiefs of [illegible] Yādavas were slain. Kṛṣṇa dejectedly wandered in a forest near the [illegible]ty; there, as he sat musing on the loss of his friends and family, a hunter [illegible]ed him through the undergrowth and mistook him for a deer. An arrow [illegible]ced his heel, which like that of Achilles was his one vulnerable spot, [illegible] he died. The city of Dvārakā was then swallowed by the sea.

Of the many elements which have gone to the making of this story that of Kṛṣṇa as hero was the earliest to have been given a place in orthodox tradition. A Kṛṣṇa son of Devakī is mentioned in one of the early Upaniṣads[59] as studying the new doctrines of the soul, and it seems certain that there is some historical basis for the legend of the hero-god; but evidently tales of many heroes from many ages and many parts of India have been fused together in the Kṛṣṇa myth, including a few which seem rather inconsistent with the general character of the conquering hero, such as that of his somewhat ignominious retreat from Mathurā. Other elements in the story, such as the destruction of the Yādavas and the death of the god, are quite non-Indian in their tragic character. The themes of the drunken brawl leading to general slaughter, of the hero slain by an arrow piercing his one vulnerable spot, and of the great city engulfed by the sea, are all known in European epic literature, but do not occur elsewhere in that of India, and are not hinted at in the Vedas. The concept of the dying god, so widespread in the ancient Near East, is found nowhere else in Indian mythology. Kaṃsa, the wicked cousin, seems to echo Herod, and perhaps also Acrisius, the cruel grandfather of Perseus. Some parts of the legend may be derived from very ancient stories, handed down and developed by Āryan warriors from the days before they entered India; others are of indigenous origin; and yet others are possibly inspired by garbled versions of tales from the West.

Kṛṣṇa in his pastoral and erotic aspect is evidently of different origin from Kṛṣṇa the hero. The name means "black", and the god is usually depicted as of that colour. Perhaps the oldest clear reference

to the pastoral Kṛṣṇa is in the early Tamil anthologies, where "the Black One" (*Māyōṉ*) plays his flute and sports with milkmaids. He may have been originally a fertility god of the Peninsula, whose cult was carried to the North by nomadic tribes of herdsmen. A tribe which appeared in Mālwā and the Western Deccan early in the Christian era, the Ābhīras, is thought to have played a big part in the propagation of the worship of Kṛṣṇa Govinda ("Lord of Herdsman",* a very common epithet of the god in this aspect).

The young Kṛṣṇa's erotic exploits have been the source of much romantic literature which, superficially, contains but a faint religious element. Invariably, however, the love of the god for the cowherds' wives is interpreted as symbolic of the love of God for the human soul. The notes of Kṛṣṇa's flute, calling the women to leave their husbands' beds and dance with him in the moonlight, represent the voice of God, calling man to leave earthly things and turn to the joys of divine love. So Jew and Christian alike have interpreted the Song of Songs, and so many mystical poets of all religions have depicted their spiritual experience. Despite its luxuriant eroticism the legend of the Divine Cowherd has produced great religious poetry (p. 480f), and inspired many pious souls.

The third element of the Kṛṣṇa legend is that of the child god. This is definitely the latest part to be assimilated, and its origin is quite unknown. Can it be partly inspired by tales brought by Christian merchants or Nestorian missionaries to the west coast of India in the early Middle Ages? Most authorities would deny this, but we do not reject the possibility out of hand. In any case, the story of the child Kṛṣṇa, often depicted in later sculpture as a plump infant crawling on all fours, gave the god a rare completeness. As hero he met the worshipper's need of a divine father and elder brother; as the young cowherd, he was a divine lover; and as infant, a son. The cult of the child Kṛṣṇa made a special appeal to the warm maternity of Indian womanhood; and even today the simpler women of India, while worshipping the divine child, so delightfully naughty despite his mighty power, refer to themselves as "the Mother of God".

Vāsudeva, the popular god of Western India in the early centuries B.C., was early identified with Kṛṣṇa, and it may be that the name, falsely interpreted as a patronymic, resulted in the tradition that Kṛṣṇa's father was called Vasudeva (with short *a* in the first syllable). Other deities, originally independent, were associated with Kṛṣṇa in one way and another. Chief of these was his elder brother Balarāma,

* *Govinda* is probably a Prākrit word, absorbed by Sanskrit in its original form. The correct Sanskrit equivalent would thus be *Gopendra*. On the orthodox assumption that the word is pure Sanskrit its translation would be "Cow-finder".

... called Halāyudha ("Armed with a Plough") and Saṅkarṣaṇa. ... bearing a wooden plough on his shoulder, was originally ... cultural deity. Traditionally he was a heavy drinker and had ... the characteristics of a Silenus. Temples to him existed at ... time, but his importance waned in the Middle Ages, as that of ... increased. Less important were the cults of Kṛṣṇa's son Pra... of his grandson Aniruddha, and of his friend Arjuna, the ... hero. The chief feminine associate of Kṛṣṇa was Rādhā, the ... mistress of his youth, who was often worshipped with him ... the late Middle Ages. Rukmiṇī, his chief queen, also received ... reverence.

(9) *Buddha*, the last historical incarnation of Viṣṇu. According to ... theologians the god became Buddha in order to delude the ... lead them to deny the Vedas, and thus ensure their damna... Jayadeva's *Gita Govinda*, however, which contains one of the ... lists of incarnations, states that Viṣṇu became Buddha out of ... passion for animals,[60] in order to put an end to bloody sacrifice. ... probably gives a clue to the true background of the Buddha ... He was included in the list, as other deities were included, ... order to assimilate heterodox elements into the Vaiṣṇavite fold: ... until quite recently the temple of the Buddha at Gayā was in the ... hands of Hindus, and the teacher was there worshipped by Hindus as ... Hindu god; but in general little attention was paid to the Buddha ...

(10) *Kalkin*, the incarnation yet to come. At the end of this dark ... Viṣṇu will appear in the form of a man mounted on a white horse, ... a flaming sword in his hand. He will judge the wicked, reward ... good, and restore the age of gold. This is a late addition to ... myth, and does not play a very important part in literature or iconography, though it is said that many simple Hindus ... the Kalkin very seriously, and long for his arrival just as old-fashioned Christians look forward to the second coming of Christ. ... parallels have been found, especially with the horseman of ... Book of Revelation,[61] but the main inspiration of the Kalkin may ... come from Buddhism, which taught the coming of Maitreya ... long before the Vaiṣṇavites devised the Kalkin. Zoroastrian ... may also have helped in the formation of the myth.

Śiva

Almost as popular as the numerous forms of Viṣṇu was Śiva, who evolved from the fierce Vedic god Rudra (p. 240), with whom merged elements of a non-Āryan fertility deity. Though developed Śaivite sects often made of their chosen divinity a wholly moral and paternal

father in heaven, Śiva's character, unlike that of Viṣṇu, is ambivalent. He lurks in horrible places, such as battlefields, burning-grounds and crossroads, which, in India as in Europe, were looked on as very inauspicious. He wears a garland of skulls and is surrounded by ghosts, evil spirits and demons. He is death and time (*Mahākāla*), which destroy all things.

But he is also a great ascetic, and the patron deity of ascetics generally. On the high slopes of the Himālayan Mount Kailāsa Śiva, the great yogī, sits on a tiger skin, deep in meditation, and through his meditation the world is maintained. He is depicted thus as wearing his long matted hair (*jaṭā*) in a topknot, in which the crescent moon is fixed, and from which flows the sacred river Gangā. In the middle of his forehead is a third eye, emblem of his superior wisdom and insight. His neck is black, scarred by a deadly poison which was the last of the objects churned from the cosmic ocean, and which he drank to save the other gods from destruction. Snakes, of which he is the lord, encircle his neck and arms. His body is covered with ashes, a favourite ascetic practice. Beside him is his weapon, the trident, while near him are his beautiful wife Pārvatī and his mount, the bull Nandi.

Though in this aspect Śiva is continually wrapped in meditation, he can, in his divine power, divide his personality. He is not only the god of mystical stillness, but also the Lord of the Dance (*Naṭarāja*) (pl. XXXVIII). This aspect of Śiva is specially popular in the Tamil country, where religious dancing was part of the earliest known tradition. In his heavenly palace on Mount Kailāsa, or in his southern home, the temple of Cidambaram or Tiḷḷai (near the seacoast about fifty miles south of Pondicherry), mystically identified with Kailāsa, Śiva dances. He has invented no less than 108 different dances, some calm and gentle, others fierce, orgiastic and terrible. Of the latter the most famous is the *tāṇḍava*, in which the angry god, surrounded by his drunken attendants (*gaṇas*), beats out a wild rhythm which destroys the world at the end of the cosmic cycle.

A further form in which the god is worshipped is known as the "South-facing" (*Dakṣināmūrti*); in this aspect he is the universal teacher, depicted in an informal pose, with one foot on the ground and the other on the throne on which he sits, and with one hand raised in a gesture of explanation. This form of Śiva perhaps owes something to Buddhist inspiration.

But Śiva was and still is chiefly worshipped in the form of the *liṅga* (pl. XVII*b*), usually a short cylindrical pillar with rounded top, which is the survival of a cult older than Indian civilization itself. Phalli have been found in the Harappā remains. Early Tamil literature refers to the setting up of ritual posts, which seem to have been [illegible] emblems. The cult of the liṅga, at all times followed by some non-Āryan peoples, was incorporated into Hinduism around the [illegible] of the Christian era, though at first it was not very important. As early as the *Ṛg Veda*, Rudra, the mountain god, was [illegible] with plants and animals. The horned ithyphallic god of Mohenjo Daro, surrounded by animals, may well be the prototype of [illegible] as the patron of reproduction in men, animals and plants. In [illegible] he is known as *Paśupati* ("Lord of Beasts") and is often [illegible] in South India as a four armed man, with one hand in an [illegible] of blessing, the second open, as though bestowing a boon, an [illegible] the third, and a small deer springing from the fingers of the [illegible].

Some Śaivite sects declare that Śiva has performed a series of [illegible]ras, but these are pure imitations of those of Viṣṇu and have [illegible] played a big part in Śaivite thought. The god has, however, manifested himself from time to time in theophanies, or taken temporary incarnation to destroy demons or test the virtue of warriors or [illegible]. Numerous legends are told of him, some of them quite uncommentary. The most famous of these legends is that of his marriage [illegible] Pārvatī, the daughter of Himālaya, the personified mountains.

The gods were troubled by the demon Tāraka, and it was prophesied that [illegible] could only be destroyed by the child of Śiva and the Daughter of the Mountains. But Śiva was continually wrapped in meditation, and the prospect of [illegible] producing offspring seemed to the other gods to be faint indeed. However, Pārvatī, the beautiful daughter of Himālaya, was sent at their behest to [illegible] upon Śiva, but though she made many attempts to win the god's attention, he took no notice of her, and in the course of her efforts Kāma, the love-[illegible], who had done his best to help her to win him, was burnt to ashes by the [illegible] from Śiva's third eye. At last Pārvatī decided to follow the god in [illegible] asceticism. Laying aside her ornaments she became a hermitess on a [illegible]by peak, and in this guise Śiva noticed her and fell in love with her. [illegible]ey were married at a great ceremony at which all the gods took part, and [illegible] Pārvatī gave birth to the war-god Skanda, who, when he grew to manhood, destroyed the demon Tāraka.

In South India a rather similar story is told of the marriage of Śiva [illegible] Mīnākṣī, daughter of a Pāṇḍyan king of Madurai, and the event is [illegible]morated by one of the most famous and splendid of South [illegible]an temples.

[illegible] *Relations of Viṣṇu and Śiva*

From the beginning of the Christian era, if not before, most [illegible]ucated Hindus have been either Vaiṣṇavites or Śaivites—that is to

say they have looked on either Viṣṇu or Śiva as the high god, or indeed as the only God, the others being merely secondary expressions of the divine, holding rather the same positions as the saints and angels in the mind of the Roman Catholic. Thus the Vaiṣṇavite does not deny the existence of Śiva, but believes that he is merely one god among many, the creation or emanation of Viṣṇu or of his demiurge Brahmā. In the same way the Śaivite looks on Viṣṇu as an emanation of Śiva. Occasionally this difference of viewpoint has led to friction and some degree of persecution, but generally the two great divisions of Hinduism have rubbed along happily together, in the conviction that on ultimate analysis both are equally right. Hinduism is essentially tolerant, and would rather assimilate than rigidly exclude. So the wiser Vaiṣṇavites and Śaivites recognized very early that the gods whom they worshipped were different aspects of the same divine being. The Divine is a diamond of innumerable facets; two very large and bright facets are Viṣṇu and Śiva, while the others represent all the gods that were ever worshipped. Some facets seem larger, brighter, and better polished than others, but in fact the devotee, whatever his sect, worships the whole diamond, which is in reality perfect. The more devout Hindus, even when illiterate and ignorant, have always been fundamentally monotheist. Thus in the *Bhagavad Gītā* Kṛṣṇa says:

"If any worshipper do reverence with faith
to any god whatever,
I make his faith firm,
and in that faith he reverences his god,
and gains his desires,
for it is I who bestow them."[62]

With this background of tolerance it is not surprising that attempts were made to harmonize Vaiṣṇavism and Śaivism. As early as Gupta times there was devised a holy trinity of Hinduism, the *Trimūrti* or Triple Form of Brahmā the creator, Viṣṇu the preserver, and Śiva the destroyer. The doctrine of the Trimūrti was popular in some circles, and is proclaimed in a fine hymn of Kālidāsa which inspired a once well-known poem of Emerson:

"Praise to you, O Trinity,
one before creation,
afterwards divided
in your three qualities! . . .
"You, the one cause
of death and life and birth,
in your three forms
proclaim your own glory . . .

"In the cycle of your day and night
all things live and all things die.
When you wake we live,
when you sleep we perish. . . .

"Hard and soft, large and small,
heavy and light, you are all things.
You are both substance and form,
ineffable in power. . . .

"You are the knower and the known,
you are the eater and the food,
you are the priest and the oblation,
you are the worshipper and the prayer."[63]

Early western students of Hinduism were impressed by the parallel between the Hindu trinity and that of Christianity. In fact the parallel is not very close, and the Hindu trinity, unlike the Holy Trinity of Christianity, never really "caught on". All Hindu trinitarianism tended to favour one god of the three; thus, from the context it is clear that Kālidāsa's hymn to the Trimūrti is really addressed to Brahmā, here looked on as the high god. The Trimūrti was in fact an artificial growth, and had little real influence.

Another significant syncretism was the god Harihara (*Hari* being a title of Viṣṇu and *Hara* of Śiva), worshipped in the form of an icon which combined characteristics of both gods. The cult of Harihara developed in the middle ages, and had some success in the Deccan, where Harihara temples were patronized by Vijayanagara kings, and where the god is still worshipped.

The Mother Goddess

Mother Goddesses were worshipped at all times in India, but between the days of the Harappā Culture and the Gupta period the cults of goddesses attracted little attention from the learned and influential, and only emerged from obscurity to a position of real importance in the Middle Ages, when feminine divinities, theoretically connected with the gods as their spouses, were once more worshipped by the upper classes.

The goddess was the *śakti*, the strength or potency of her male counterpart. It was thought that the god was inactive and transcendent, while his female element was active and immanent, and by the Gupta period the wives of the gods, whose existence had always been recognized but who had been shadowy figures in earlier theology, began to be worshipped in special temples. In the early 5th

century an inscription of Western India tells of a certain Mayūrākṣaka,

> "minister of the king, who established, to gain merit,
> this most awful temple,
> a temple filled with demonesses, . . .
> sacred to the Mothers, who shout
> most loudly in the thick darkness,
> where the lotuses are shaken
> by the fierce winds
> aroused by magic spells."[64]

From this time onwards the Mother Goddess increased in importance, until the wave of devotional Vaiṣṇavism swept Northern India early in the Muslim period, and stopped the progress of her cult, which is still strong in Bengal and Assam, and is known in other parts of India.

The chief form of the Mother Goddess was that of the wife of Śiva, called in her benevolent aspect *Pārvatī* ("Daughter of the Mountain"), *Mahādevī* ("the Great Goddess"), *Satī* ("the Virtuous"), *Gaurī* ("the Fair One"), *Annapūrṇā* ("Bestower of Much Food"), or simply "the Mother" (*Mātā*, Tamil *Ammai*). In her grim aspect she was known as *Durgā* ("Inaccessible"), *Kālī* ("the Black One"), and *Caṇḍī* ("the Fierce"). The terrible Tamil war-goddess *Koṟṟavai*, who danced among the slain on the battlefield and ate their flesh, though independent in origin, was early identified with her.

In her fierce aspect she is often depicted as a horrible hag (pl. XXXVII*b*), frequently with many arms bearing different weapons, with fierce carnivorous tusks, a red tongue lolling from her mouth, and a garland of skulls. Her mount is a lion, and she is sometimes shown as a sternly beautiful woman, slaying a buffalo-headed demon in the manner of St. George and the dragon. The more gentle aspect of the goddess is that of a beautiful young woman, often portrayed with her lord Śiva. An interesting iconographical development is that of the *Ardhanārīśvara*, a figure half Śiva and half Pārvatī, representing the union of the god with his śakti. As Śiva is worshipped in the liṅga or phallic emblem, so Durgā is worshipped in the female emblem, or *yoni*. According to legend Pārvatī, in the incarnation before that in which she became the bride of Śiva, had been born as Satī, the daughter of the sage Dakṣa, and had then also become the wife of the great god. When her father quarrelled with her divine lord she flung herself into the flames of his sacrificial fire, and the ashes of her *yoni* fell in various spots in India, which became the *pīṭhas*, or sacred shrines of her cult.

Lesser Gods

As well as Viṣṇu, Śiva and Durgā, many other gods were worshipped. Unlike the gods of the Veda, the new gods of Hinduism were no longer closely tied to natural phenomena, but were thought of more anthropomorphically.

Brahmā, the Prajāpati of later Vedic times, had a history of slow decline. In the early Buddhist scriptures he and Indra were the greatest of the gods, and in the *Mahābhārata* he was still very important; but though depicted in medieval sculpture, sometimes with four faces, he was little worshipped after Gupta times. A single temple of Brahmā, by the sacred lake Puṣkara near the modern Ajmer, is the only one known.

The numerous solar deities of the Vedas were merged in Hinduism into a single god, usually known as *Sūrya* ("the Sun") (pl. XXVI*a*). In Gupta and medieval times there existed numerous temples of the sun, especially in Western India, which was open to Zoroastrian influence, and some of his worshippers seem to have looked on him as the greatest god of all.

> "He who is worshipped by the host of gods that they may live,
> and by the blessed for their welfare,
> by ascetics, who suppress their senses, intent on meditation, for their salvation,
> —may that shining one, cause of the world's rise and decline, protect you.
>
> "The divine seers, wise in true knowledge, for all their efforts have not known him wholly,
> whose rays reach out to nourish the three worlds,
> whom gods and demigods and men hymn together as he rises,
> who fulfils the desires of his worshippers—
> homage to the Sun!"[65]

In comparison with the sun, the Moon (*Candra* or *Soma*), masculine in gender, had but slight religious importance, being little more than an emblem of Śiva. He had no independent cult, but was worshipped as one of the nine planets (p. 493). The cult of the planets was popularized by the growth of astrology in medieval times, and representations of them are fairly numerous.

Indra, the Vedic war-god, lost much of his prestige but gained new attributes. Mounted on his elephant Airāvata, he was guardian of the eastern quarter of the universe, and ruler of one of the lower heavens, Amarāvatī. Under an alternative name, Śakra, perhaps originally a different god, he was among the chief divinities of early Buddhism,

second only to Brahmā. By the Middle Ages he had few temples or worshippers.

Varuṇa, the all-seeing god of the Vedas (p. 238ff), descended from his heavenly palace to become a god of the waters, but he remained the guardian of the western quarter of the universe. The cult of Varuṇa disappeared early, though Tamil fishermen long worshipped a marine deity called Varuṇaṉ, in the emblem of a "shark's horn". This god, however, is clearly an indigenous Tamil divinity who had acquired an Āryan name.

Yama, guardian of the southern quarter, the death-god of the Vedas, was still remembered, though rarely if ever specially worshipped. His role had somewhat altered, for he was no longer the cheerful lord of paradise, but the stern judge of the dead, ruling only over the purgatories where the wicked suffered until their rebirth. The idea of a divine judge, theoretically unnecessary according to the doctrine of karma, may have been imported from the West, where it was known in many cults. Sometimes Yama, aided by his clerk Citragupta, is described as weighing the deeds of the souls of the dead in a balance, rather like the Egyptian Thoth.

The northern quarter was ruled by the god *Kubera*, lord of precious metals, minerals, jewels, and wealth generally. This god, under the alternative name Vaiśravaṇa, first appears briefly and faintly in later Vedic literature, and is well known in Buddhism and Jainism. He dwells in the beautiful jewelled city of Alakā, near Mount Kailāsa, and commands hosts of gnomes (*guhyaka*) and fairies (*yakṣa*). He is usually depicted as a dwarfish figure with a large paunch. He was the object of a cult, though not of an important one.

These four gods, Yama, Indra, Varuṇa and Kubera, were known as *Lokapālas*, or Guardians of the Universe. In late texts four further guardians of the intermediate quarters were added—*Soma* in the North-East, *Vāyu* (the wind-god) in the North-West, *Agni* in the South-East, and *Sūrya* in the South-West. Of these Agni, the fire-god, was still important at the time of the Epics, but he too lost much of his hold on the imagination in later times, while Vāyu, the wind-god, was a vague and tenuous deity, except in the late school of Madhva (p. 336).

The war-god *Skanda*, also called *Kumāra* ("The Prince"), *Kārtikeya* and, in the South, *Subrahmaṇya*, was probably originally a non-Āryan divinity. He was the son of Śiva and Pārvatī and his sole function, according to orthodox tradition, was to slay the demon Tāraka, which scarcely accounts for his great popularity. From the beginning of the Christian era the cult of Skanda was widespread in North India, though it declined somewhat in medieval times. In the South it was even more important, for the name and attributes of the god were imposed on the chief deity of the ancient Tamils, Muruganaṉ, by which name Skanda is still sometimes known in the Tamil country. Muruganaṉ in his original form was a mountain god, worshipped in bacchanalian dances, at which he was impersonated by a medicine-man holding a spear (*vēlaṉ*), whom the dancers identified with the god. He aroused passion and erotic frenzy in girls and women, and the dances of Muruganaṉ were evidently orgiastic. The Tamil Muruganaṉ was armed with a spear, and joined his fierce mother Koṟṟavai in her cannibal feasts on the battlefield; hence his identification with the Aryan Skanda is not surprising, though Muruganaṉ's original character as a fertility god is evident even today. Skanda is usually depicted as a handsome young man, often with six faces, mounted on a peacock.

Gaṇeśa or *Gaṇapati*, "Chief of the *Gaṇas*" (a class of demigod attendant on Śiva), another son of Śiva and Pārvatī, is one of the best known Indian divinities in the West. He has an elephant's head with one broken tusk and a fat paunch, and he rides on a rat. Among the latest of the gods of the Hindu pantheon, he is not attested before the 5th century A.D., and he was of little importance before the Middle Ages. Evidently he is the survival of a primitive non-Āryan elephant god, but in Hinduism he has become mild and cultured. He is the "Lord of Obstacles" (*Vighneśvara*), and is worshipped at the beginning of all undertakings to remove snags and hindrances. He is particularly interested in literary and educational activities, and is the patron of grammarians; manuscripts and printed books often begin with the auspicious formula *Śrī-Gaṇeśāya namaḥ*, "Reverence to Lord Gaṇeśa". The cheerful and benevolent elephant-god was, and still is, revered by nearly every Hindu, whether Vaiṣṇavite or Śaivite. A small medieval sect looked on him as their chief god, but his status has generally been comparatively humble, though important.

Hanumant, the monkey god, the son of Vāyu and the friend and servant of Rāma, was no doubt a popular deity long before his incorporation in the pantheon. He is still an important village god, worshipped in many shrines in the form of a monkey with more or less human body. He is a beneficent guardian spirit, and in his honour monkeys are generally looked on as sacred.

Kāma ("Desire"), known by many other names and epithets, was the Indian love-god. Like his European counterpart he is depicted as a handsome youth, armed with a bow and arrow, but the Indian Eros has a bow of sugar-cane strung with a row of bees, and his arrows are flowers. He is attended by a troop of nymphs (*apsarases*), one of whom carries his standard, which bears a sea-monster. Kāma is referred to in the "Hymn of Creation" (p. 250f) and in certain

other Vedic passages as being the firstborn of the primeval chaos, but this *kāma* is certainly not the Hindu love-god, but vaguely personified cosmic desire. On the strength of these early references it was generally believed by the theologians of Hinduism that Kāma had no parents, but emerged spontaneously at the beginning of time to act as a catalyst in the universal process. His flowery arrows affect gods and men alike, and have only once been known to fail in their purpose—when Kāma attempted to rouse the passion of the great god Śiva, and was burnt to ashes for his pains (p. 311), to be restored to life through the entreaties of his favourite wife, the goddess Rati ("Pleasure"). He is frequently referred to in literature and was evidently a popular deity among young people of both sexes, honoured at a great annual festival (p. 209). The Buddhist Māra ("the Smiter") was sometimes identified with Kāma, but had sinister attributes, and was a sort of Satan, the personification of the world, the flesh and the devil. His temptation of the Buddha is one of the most famous episodes of Buddhist legend.

All the gods have complementary goddesses, their wives, but most of these are pale reflexions of their lords, bearing the same names with feminine terminations (e.g. *Indrāṇī*, *Brahmāṇī*, etc.). They were often worshipped in a group, usually of seven, to which the gods Kārtikeya and Gaṇeśa were sometimes added, and portrayals of these goddesses (*Mātṛkā*, *Ambikā*, "the Little Mothers") are fairly common in medieval sculpture. As well as Durgā, who must rank as one of the three chief deities of Hinduism, other goddesses were important, however.

Lakṣmī ("Fortune"), the wife of Viṣṇu, also often called *Śrī*, was the goddess of good luck and temporal blessing. In some legends she is said to be coexistent with Viṣṇu, but according to others she appeared in her full glory, like Aphrodite, at the churning of the primeval ocean (p. 304f). She is usually portrayed as a woman of mature beauty, seated on a lotus and often with a lotus in her hand, attended by two elephants, who sprinkle water on her from their trunks. Though never an object of a special cult, her icons are numerous, and she was much worshipped as a subsidiary deity. She was believed to incarnate herself as the wife of the incarnation of Viṣṇu, and thus she was worshipped as Sītā, the spouse of Rāma, as Rukmiṇī, the chief queen of Kṛṣṇa, or as Rādhā, the favourite of his youth.

Sarasvatī (pl. XXXIII*b*), the wife of Brahmā, had an autonomous role as the patron of art, music and letters. In the *Ṛg Veda* she was a sacred river, but in later Vedic literature she was identified with a hypostatic goddess of temporary importance, Vāc ("Speech"). She was depicted as a beautiful fair young woman, often with a *vīṇā*, or Indian

lute, and a book in her hand, and attended by a swan.* Traditionally she was the inventor of the Sanskrit language and the *Devanāgarī* script. Sarasvatī has always been worshipped by students, writers and musicians, and her cult is still maintained.

Demigods and Spirits

As well as these greater gods there was an infinite number of lesser ones. Every village had its local god or goddess (*grāmadevatā*), often a rude image or fetish set up under a sacred tree. Some of these village fertility deities, through a process of assimilation, attained widespread popularity. Local goddesses were often vaguely identified with Durgā, but were rarely thoroughly incorporated into the mythological scheme, and they maintained an autonomous existence on the fringes of the orthodox pantheon. Chief of such goddesses was Śitalā ("the Cool"), called in the Tamil country Māriyammai ("Mother Death"), the goddess of smallpox, worshipped for prevention and cure, especially by mothers on behalf of their children. Similarly the snake-goddess Manasā protected from snakebite. Her worship is not certainly attested in our period, but in medieval Bengal she attained a respectable status in the orthodox pantheon, and she was almost certainly worshipped by the masses in the earlier period. A male deity of this type, widely popular in the Tamil countryside from ancient days, was Aiyanar, a beneficent guardian deity much revered by peasants, and sometimes thought of as a son of Śiva. The cities of ancient India, like those of the classical world, had their guardian deities, who might be important members of the pantheon but were often of only local significance. Besides these local gods the world was full of demigods and spirits, good and evil.

The snake-spirits (*Nāga*) (pl. XXVIII*b*), half-human but with serpents' tails, were very ancient objects of worship. They dwelt in the beautiful underground city of Bhogavatī, and guarded great treasures, some of which they occasionally bestowed on mortals whom they favoured. They could take wholly human form, and more than one dynasty of ancient India claimed descent from the union of a human hero and a *nāginī*. Probably the prototypes of the nāgas were the dark primitive tribes, met by the Āryans in their expansion over India, for a primitive people called Nāgas exists in Assam to this day; the cult of serpents is so widespread in India that the nāgas must certainly owe much to aboriginal snake cults followed by many tribes all over India.

The *Yakṣas*, especially associated with the god Kubera, were a sort

* *Haṃsa*, strictly a type of goose; but, owing to the connotation of the word "goose" in English, *haṃsa* is usually translated "swan" in this and other works on ancient India.

of gnome or fairy, reverenced by country people. Before the Christian era their cult was widespread, but they lost their significance as the great gods of Hinduism became more widely worshipped. They were generally looked on as friendly to men, but their womenfolk might sometimes be malevolent, and ate little children.

The *Gandharvas* survived from Vedic times as servants of Indra and heavenly musicians. In the time of the Buddha they seem to have been specially connected with the procreation of children, and the presence of a Gandharva was thought necessary for conception. Associated with them, and sometimes referred to as a subdivision of their order, were the *Kinnaras*, also heavenly musicians, who had human heads and horses' bodies, and thus resembled the classical centaurs, with whom they may be connected.

The Gandharvas were all male: Their female counterparts were the *Apsarases*, in Vedic times connected with water, but later translated to heaven. They were beautiful and libidinous, and specially delighted in tempting ascetics in their meditations. Thus Menakā the apsaras seduced the great sage Viśvāmitra, and conceived Śakuntalā, the heroine of Kālidāsa's famous drama (p. 437ff). Another apsaras famous in story was Urvaśī, the heroine of another drama of Kālidāsa, the story of whose love for the mortal king Purūravas (p. 407ff) is as old as the *Ṛg Veda*. Sometimes the apsarases appear in the role of valkyries, raising slain heroes from the battlefield and bearing them to heaven to be their lovers.

A further group of demigods was that of the *Vidyādharas* or heavenly magicians, mysterious beings who lived in magic cities in the high Himālayas. Like the Vedic munis (p. 245) they could fly through the air and transform themselves at will, and they were generally favourable to men.

The *Ṛṣis* ("sages" or more literally "seers"), were the composers of the Vedic hymns, and other legendary wise men of olden times who had been translated to heaven, where they enjoyed a status comparable to that of the gods. Chief of these were the "Seven Ṛṣis", identified with the stars of the Great Bear—Marīci, Atri, Aṅgiras, Pulastya, Pulaha, Kratu and Vasiṣṭha. Other important ṛṣis were Kaśyapa and Dakṣa, said in some stories to have been the progenitors of gods and men; Nārada, who invented the vīṇā and was a sort of patron saint of music; Viśvāmitra, a ksatriya who by his piety and asceticism raised himself to brāhmaṇ status, and who is heard of in many legends; Bṛhaspati, the preceptor of gods and demons, who began his career in Vedic times as a god, but whose status fell to that of a ṛṣi, also identified with the planet Jupiter, and who is said to have founded the materialist system of philosophy and

the science of statecraft; and Agastya, who taught the Southerners religion and culture. Less exalted than the ṛṣis were the *Siddhas*, a large class of saints who had won a place in heaven by their piety.

Chief among evil spirits were the *Asuras*, or demons. The word *asura* was in Vedic times applied to certain gods (p. 238), but in Hinduism it was used for a group of supernatural beings continually at war with the gods, whose power they sometimes shook, but never conquered. More immediately dangerous to men were the various classes of goblin, such as the *Rākṣasas*, most famous of whom was Rāvaṇa the ten-headed demon king of Laṅkā (Ceylon), whom Rāma defeated and killed. Few rākṣasas had the same power as Rāvaṇa, but all were frightful and dangerous, taking terrible forms and lurking in dark places at night, to kill and eat men and otherwise distress them. Somewhat less terrible were the *Piśācas*, who, like the nāgas, may have had a material basis in a wild tribe, since a very base dialect of Prākrit was attributed to them. Both these classes of demon haunted battlefields, charnel grounds, and places of violent death, as did a special class of demon, the *Vetāla* or vampire, which took up its abode in corpses. Finally the night was haunted by ghosts (*preta, bhūta*), the naked spirits of those who had died violent deaths and for whom śrāddha had not been performed. These were very dangerous to men, particularly to their own surviving relatives.

Hindu worship was not confined to the propitiation of gods and demigods, for the whole of nature was in some sense divine. Great and holy men were reverenced, both during their lives and for long after their deaths, for they contained a portion of godhead. Thus the sixty-three Nāyaṇars of Tamil Śaivism and the twelve Āḻvārs of Tamil Vaiṣṇavism still enjoy the status of demigods, as do other great religious teachers. Not only men, but animals and plants were and still are holy, notably the cow. According to legend the cow Surabhi, the mother of all cows, was one of the treasures churned from the cosmic ocean. The "five products of the cow" (*pañcagavya*)—milk, curd, butter, urine and dung—were all of great purifying potency, especially when combined in a single mixture. Despite her sanctity, there was no cow-goddess, and Surabhi and the various "wishing-cows" of legend, by milking which all desires were fulfilled, had no temples in their honour. The living beast was revered, not as representative of any deity, but in her own right. The bull, on the other hand, received honour as the mount of Śiva; the image of Nandi is found in most Śaivite temples and honoured with offerings.

After the cow the snake was perhaps the most revered animal of ancient India. Legendary serpents, such as Śeṣa (p. 302) and Vāsuki (p. 304), gave the snake prestige, but the cult no doubt sprang

from very primitive levels, since the mysterious snake is revered all over the world by uncivilized peoples as an emblem of both death and fertility. An offering to snakes, made at the beginning of the rainy season, was part of the regular domestic ritual of Hinduism. Ant-hills were respected as the home of snakes. Other animals, though associated with various divinities, played little part in Hindu cults. The monkey, much revered by peasants and simple folk in many parts of India, is not referred to as specially sacred in early Hindu texts.

Tree cults, common the world over among ancient peoples, were widespread in India, where each village had its sacred tree or grove. Specially sacred were the *pippala* or *aśvattha* (pīpal, *Ficus religiosa*), the sanctity of which spread to Buddhism, and the *vaṭa* or *nyagrodha*, the banyan (*Ficus indica*), the secondary roots of which, reaching down from its branches, formed the basis of much religious symbolism. Many other trees were more or less holy, notably the *aśoka* (p. 204), to which women prayed for children. There were also sacred plants, such as the *tulasī*, a type of basil, which was connected with Viṣṇu, and which is still grown in the courtyards of many Hindu homes and tended with great care. Two types of grass, *kuśa* and *darbha*, were also sacred from Vedic times onwards. The Vedic soma plant, however, was forgotten.

Every hill or mountain had some degree of sanctity, especially the Himālayas, which were the foothills of Mount Meru, the centre of the world. Around Meru, on mountains which reached to the heavens, dwelt the gods. Vaikuṇṭha, the home of Viṣṇu, was never satisfactorily identified, but Kailāsa, the mountain of Śiva, was recognized as a certain peak in the Central Himālayas which has long been a place of pilgrimage. Numerous other mountains and hills in many parts of India were famous for their sanctity. Even rocks often had a religious significance, especially if upright and vaguely resembling the liṅga of Śiva. The ammonite (*śālagrāma*), a fossilized shellfish, was recognized as one of the symbols of Viṣṇu.

Rivers were also sacred, especially, of course, the Gangā, which sprang from the foot of the Viṣṇu, flowed over the sky in the form of the milky way (*Mandākinī*), and then fell to earth from the matted locks of Śiva. Gaṅgā was often personified as a goddess in her own right, like her great tributary Yamunā. Other rivers held specially sacred were the Sarasvatī, which was believed to flow underground and join the Gangā at its confluence with the Yamunā at Prayāga (Allahābād), the Narmadā, the Godāvarī, the Kṛṣṇā (modern Kistnā) and the Kāviri. Certain lakes, notably Mānasa in the high Himālayas near Mount Kailāsa, and Puṣkara, near Ajmer, were also sacred, and even cities were divine (p. 202, n).

Cosmogony

Hindu cosmology in its final form was perhaps later than the cosmologies of the Buddhists and Jainas. According to this system the cosmos passes through cycles within cycles for all eternity. The basic cycle is the *kalpa*, a "day of Brahmā", or 4,320 million earthly years. His night is of equal length. 360 such days and nights constitute a "year of Brahmā" and his life lasts for 100 such years.* The largest cycle is therefore 311,040,000 million years long, after which the whole universe returns to the ineffable world-spirit, until another creator god is evolved.†

In each cosmic day the god creates the universe and again absorbs it. During the cosmic night he sleeps, and the whole universe is gathered up into his body, where it remains as a potentiality. Within each kalpa are fourteen *manvantaras*, or secondary cycles, each lasting 306,720,000 years, with long intervals between them. In these periods the world is recreated, and a new Manu appears, as the progenitor of the human race. We are now in the seventh manvantara of the kalpa, of which the Manu is known as Manu Vaivasvata.

Each manvantara contains seventy-one *Mahāyugas*, or æons, of which a thousand form the kalpa. Each mahāyuga is in turn divided into four *yugas* or ages, called *Kṛta*, *Tretā*, *Dvāpara* and *Kali* (p. 209). Their lengths are respectively 4,800, 3,600, 2,400, and 1,200 "years of the gods", each of which equals 360 human years. Each yuga represents a progressive decline in piety, morality, strength, stature, longevity and happiness. We are at present in the Kali-yuga, which began, according to tradition, in 3102 B.C., believed to be the year of the Mahābhārata War.

The end of the Kali-yuga, according to many epic passages, is marked by confusion of classes, the overthrow of established standards, the cessation of all religious rites, and the rule of harsh and alien kings. Soon after this the world is destroyed by flood and fire. This view is propounded strongly in texts which date from about the beginning of the Christian era, when alien kings did in fact rule much of India, and when established practices were shaken by heresies such as Buddhism and Jainism. An earlier tradition would place the Mahā-bharata War c. 900 B.C. (p. 40), according to which the 1,200 years of the Kali-yuga, if read as human years and not as "years of the gods", would at this time be nearing their end. Evidently some pious Hindus thought that the dissolution of the cosmos was imminent. Perhaps it

* Brahmā is said to be now in his fifty-first year.

† Though the terms "day" and "year of Brahmā" are commonly used, the god whose life contains the universe is, as we have seen, thought of by Vaiṣṇavites as Viṣṇu and by Śaivites as Śiva, and Brahmā is a mere demiurge, the god in his creative aspect.

is to the departure of this fear in later times that we must attribute the devising of the "years of the gods", which made the dissolution of the world comfortably distant. Most medieval texts state that the cosmic dissolution occurs only after the last cycle of the kalpa, and that the transition from one æon to the next takes place rapidly and comparatively calmly; the expectation of the Kalkin (p. 309), who will not destroy but will regenerate the world, could not otherwise be harmonized with the scheme of the yugas. In this, its final form, the Hindu system of world-cycles is clearly an imperfect synthesis of more than one independent doctrine; the manvantaras, especially, do not fit tidily into the scheme, and must surely be derived from a source different from that of the mahāyugas.

The system of the four yugas immediately brings to mind the four ages of ancient Greece—and indeed the Indian yugas are sometimes named after metals—gold, silver, copper and iron. A similar doctrine of four ages existed in ancient Persia, and the three schemes may have been borrowed from a common source.

The act of creation was thought of in more than one manner. The school called *Sāṅkhya* (p. 326f) and some lesser schools postulated the existence of primeval matter (*prakṛti*), of which the creator made use to form the world, but the *Vedānta* school, certainly the most influential in the Middle Ages, maintained that everything in the universe, souls and matter alike, was produced from God's own essence. The motive of creation was explained by the Vedānta school as the "sport" (*līlā*) of the World Soul, and the creation of the cosmos was thought of on the analogy of the production of a work of art from the mind of an artist.

The Soul, Karma and Saṃsāra

The doctrine of karma, elaborated in Upaniṣadic times and adopted by Buddhism and Jainism, was also part and parcel of Hinduism. According to the Hindu definition karma (literally "work," or "deed") was the unseen ripening of past actions, and though not in Hinduism a substantial category, as in Jainism, it was thought of as accumulating and dispersing. Through karma the body of the next life, divine, human, animal or hellish, was acquired; and on previous karma depended a man's character, fortune and social class, and his happiness and sorrow. Every good act sooner or later brought its result in happiness, and every evil act in sorrow.

The belief in karma does not necessarily involve fatalism. A fatalist strain often appeared in Hindu thought, but most teachers disapproved of it. Our present condition is inevitable, but only

because of the karma accruing from our past deeds. We cannot escape the law of karma any more than we can escape the law of gravity or the passage of time, but by judgement and forethought we can utilize the law of karma to our own advantage.

The process of transmigration was interpreted somewhat variously, but all schools agreed that the soul does not transmigrate in a state of nudity, but with a sheath or series of sheaths of subtle matter; the condition of the sheaths depends on the balance of previous good and evil karma, and the new birth is determined by the nature of the sheaths which surround the soul. The subtle body of transmigration is deprived of sense-organs, including mind, the sixth sense, and therefore the soul cannot normally remember previous births or the passage from one body to another. Very advanced souls, however, can sometimes recapture memories of previous existences, and some sects evolved a special technique for doing so. Souls are liable to transmigration throughout the life of the god Brahmā, though at the end of each cosmic day or kalpa they return to his body as potentialities only. On the death of Brahmā, at the final dissolution of the universe at the end of a hundred Brahmā-years, they are absorbed into the World Spirit and their karma is annihilated.

Saṃsāra, the continual passage from body to body, often compared to an ever-rolling wheel, is infinitely tedious, and Hinduism inherited the desire for release from transmigration which was almost universal in Indian thought. Conceptions of the state of release or salvation (*mukti*) and the means of obtaining it differed widely.

The Six Systems of Salvation

Early in the Christian era, if not before, there was a theoretical classification of the various schools of thought looked on as orthodox, and the *Ṣaḍdarśana* or "Six Doctrines" became a regular feature of Hinduism. The Six Schools were actually of differing origin and purpose, but all were brought into the scheme by being treated as equally valid ways of salvation. They were divided into three groups of two, which were thought to be related and complementary. These were: *Nyāya* and *Vaiśeṣika*; *Sāṅkhya* and *Yoga*; and *Mīmāṃsā* and *Vedānta*.

Nyāya ("Analysis") was rather a school of logic and epistemology than of theology. It looked back to the teacher Akṣapāda Gautama, the sūtras or aphorisms attributed to whom are probably no earlier than the Christian era. Logic was forced into the scheme as a means of salvation by the contention that clear thinking and logical argument were essential means to the highest bliss, and thus a religious basis was given to what was essentially a system of reasoning (p. 503f).

Vaiśeṣika ("the School of Individual Characteristics") was complementary to Nyāya, though perhaps older, and in medieval times the two merged into what was virtually a single school. While Nyāya specialized in logic, Vaiśeṣika was interested rather in physics than theology. The earliest text of the school is the sūtras of the legendary founder, Ulūka Kaṇāda, which had numerous exponents and commentators, the greatest of whom was Praśastapāda of the 5th century. The basic tenet of Vaiśeṣika, held in common with Jainism and some schools of Buddhism, was that nature is atomic. The atoms are distinct from the soul, of which they are the instrument. Each element has individual characteristics (*viśeṣas*), which distinguish it from the four non-atomic substances (*dravyas*) which the school recognizes—time, space, soul and mind. The atoms are eternal, but in the great dissolution at the end of the life of Brahmā they are separated one from another, and all things are destroyed. The new Brahmā utilizes the old atoms to create the world afresh. Vaiśeṣika thus postulated a dualism of matter and soul, and declared that salvation depends on fully recognizing the atomic nature of the universe, and its difference from the soul.*

Sāṅkhya ("the Count") is perhaps the oldest of the six systems, being mentioned in the *Bhagavad Gītā* and occurring in a primitive form in the Upaniṣads. Its legendary founder was the ancient sage Kapila, but the earliest surviving text of the system is the *Sāṅkhya-kārikā* of Īśvarakṛṣṇa, perhaps of the 4th century A.D. Sāṅkhya resembles Jainism in its rigid dualism and fundamental atheism. It teaches the existence of twenty-five basic principles (*tattva*), of which the first is *prakṛti*—a term usually loosely translated "matter". Creation, or rather evolution, is not due to the operation of a divinity but to the inherent nature of prakṛti. From prakṛti develops (2) Intelligence (*buddhi*, also called *mahat* "the Great One"), and hence is produced (3) Self-consciousness (*ahaṅkāra*). Prakṛti has in fact evolved into an active divinity. Through self-consciousness emerge the five subtle elements (*tanmātra*), invisible matter in its most ethereal form; the five are (4) "ether" (*ākāśa*), (5) air, (6) light, (7) water and (8) earth. From the subtle elements the material elements (*mahābhūta*) emerge (9–13). Working on this material, Self-consciousness then produces the five organs of sense (*jñānendriya*): (14) hearing, (15) touch, (16) sight, (17) taste and (18) smell, and the five of action (*karmendriya*): (19) speech, (20) grasping, (21) walking, (22) evacuation and (23) procreation. Each of

* For further details on Vaiśeṣika atomism see p. 499.

these organs corresponds to an element, in respective order. Finally Self-consciousness produces the twenty-fourth of the basic components of the world, mind (*manas*), looked on as a sixth sense, which acts as intermediary between all the ten organs and the outside world. This remarkable and fantastic doctrine of cosmic evolution, interpreted in simple terms, implies that bodies, and indeed the whole cosmos, are products of the ego (*ahaṅkāra*), conceived as basically material.

But there is another tattva, the twenty-fifth. This is *Puruṣa*, literally "the Person", the soul. As in Jainism, there is an infinite number of souls in the universe, all equal, eternally inactive spectators of the evolution of prakṛti. Puruṣa is not dependent on prakṛti nor prakṛti on puruṣa—a universe is conceivable completely devoid of soul and yet evolving in the same way as the universe we know, for intelligence, personality and mind are not parts of the soul. Yet souls in some way become involved in matter, and their salvation lies in realizing their difference from it.

A very important feature of Sāṅkhya metaphysics is the doctrine of the three constituent qualities (*guṇa*), causing virtue (*sattva*), passion (*rajas*) and dullness (*tamas*). In its undeveloped state cosmic matter contains these three in equilibrium, but as the world evolves one or other of the three preponderates in different objects or beings, and the proportions account for the values of the universe. *Sattva guṇa*, the quality of virtue, is present in all things tending to truth, wisdom, beauty and goodness; the quality of passion inheres in all that is fierce, violent, energetic, forceful or active; while dullness is found in what is dark, stupid, gloomy, wretched or unhappy. This threefold classification affected many aspects of Indian life and thought and its influence reached far beyond the Sāṅkhya school which made it its own.

The dualism of soul and matter and the fundamental atheism of Sāṅkhya were somewhat modified in the Middle Ages as a concession to the prevalent monism and theism. *Puruṣa* literally means "person" or "man", and *prakṛti* is of feminine gender. It is not surprising that the latter was personified as the wife of the former, especially by the tantric sects. The inactive puruṣa of the earlier system became a generative force, and the cold and rather pedantic Sāṅkhya, in a much modified form, became the common property of popular Indian religion of later times.

Yoga, the name of the fourth system, is a word well known in the West, and is connected etymologically with the English word "yoke". It may be freely translated "spiritual discipline" or "application". The term is loosely used to imply all the religious exercises and acts

of self-mortification of Indian religion, the earnest follower of such practices being a *yogī*. In this broad sense yoga has been part of the teaching of every Indian sect, but it was also the name of a distinct school, which emphasized psychic training as the chief means of salvation. The basic text of this school is the *Yoga Sūtras* of Patañjali; this teacher was traditionally identified with a famous grammarian believed to have lived in the 2nd century B.C., but the sūtras in their present form are probably several centuries later.

The metaphysical ideas of the Yoga school were originally closely akin to those of Sāṅkhya, but they differed in that they brought a deity into the picture. The God (*Īśvara*) of Yoga was not a creator, but a specially exalted soul which had existed for all eternity without ever being enmeshed in matter. Thus the god of Yoga resembled the Buddha of the Lesser Vehicle, or the glorified Tīrthaṅkara of Jainism, never coming in contact with his worshippers but invaluable as an example. He was specially symbolized in the sacred syllable *ŌM*, which in the Yoga school was much revered, as giving insight into the sublime purity of the soul and thus aiding meditation. A Yoga theism soon developed, however, and the God of later Yoga texts differs little from that of other schools.

The course of training of the yogī was divided into eight stages, reminding us of the eightfold path of Buddhism, but far less practical:

(1) Self-control (*yama*), the practice of the five moral rules: non-violence, truthfulness, not stealing, chastity, and the avoidance of greed.

(2) Observance (*niyama*), the regular and complete observance of five further moral rules, some of them rather overlapping with those in the category of self-control—purity, contentment, austerity, study of the Vedas, and devotion to God.

(3) Posture (*āsana*), sitting in certain postures, difficult without practice, which are thought to be essential to meditation. The most famous of these is *padmāsana*, the "Lotus Posture", in which the feet are placed on the opposite thighs, and in which gods and sages are commonly depicted.

(4) Control of the Breath (*prāṇāyāma*), whereby the breath is held and controlled and the respiration forced into unusual rhythms, which are believed to be of great physical and spiritual value.

(5) Restraint (*pratyāhāra*), whereby the sense organs are trained to take no note of their perceptions.

(6) Steadying the Mind (*dhāraṇā*), by concentration on a single object, such as the tip of the nose, the navel, an icon, or a sacred symbol.

(7) Meditation (*dhyāna*), when the object of concentration fills the whole mind.

(8) Deep Meditation (*samādhi*), when the whole personality is temporarily dissolved.

Yoga was sometimes developed in special and rather dubious ways, especially by the tantric schools of the Middle Ages. The course of training outlined above was known as "Royal Yoga" (*rājayoga*), but other yoga systems developed, such as the "Yoga of Spells" (*mantrayoga*), which taught the continual repetition of magic syllables and phrases as a means of dissociating the consciousness; the "Yoga of Force" (*haṭhayoga*), which emphasized the importance of physical means such as special acrobatic exercises and very difficult postures, and sometimes advocated sexual union as a means of salvation; and the "Yoga of Dissolution" (*layayoga*), often identified with haṭha-yoga, based on certain ancient Indian physiological notions, which play a big part in the form of yoga sometimes taught by Western practitioners.

The chief vein of the body, known as *suṣumṇa*, runs through the spinal column. Along it at different points are six "wheels" (*cakra*), or concentrations of psychic energy. At the top of the vein *suṣumṇa*, within the skull, is *sahasrāra*, a specially powerful psychic centre symbolically referred to as a lotus. In the lowest "wheel", behind the genitals, is the *kuṇḍalinī*, the "serpent power", generally in a quiescent state. By yogic practices the kuṇḍalinī is awakened, rises through the vein suṣumṇa, passes through all the six "wheels" of psychic force, and unites with the topmost sahasrāra. By awakening and raising his kuṇḍalinī the yogī gains spiritual strength, and by uniting it with sahasrāra he wins salvation.

The awakened kuṇḍalinī gives to the yogī superhuman power and knowledge, and many yogīs have practised yoga rather for this than for salvation. Some adepts of yoga have developed certain powers which cannot fully be accounted for by European medical science and which cannot be explained away as subjective, but the physiological basis of laya- and haṭha-yoga is certainly false; there is no *kuṇḍalinī*, *suṣumṇa* or *sahasrāra*. The ancient mystical physiology of India needs further study, not only by professional Indologists, but by open-minded biologists and psychologists, who may reveal the true secret of the yogī. For whatever we may think about his spiritual claims there is no doubt that the advanced yogī can hold his breath for very long periods without suffering injury, can control the rhythm of his own heart-beats, can withstand extremes of heat and cold, can remain healthy on a starvation diet, and, despite his severe and frugal life and his remarkable physical contortions, which would ruin the system of any ordinary man, can often survive to a very advanced age with full use of his faculties.

Mīmāṃsā ("Enquiry"), differed in origin from the other systems in that it was not so much a school of salvation as of exposition. Its

"There is nothing in the three worlds which I need,
nothing I do not own,
nothing which I must get—
and yet I labour forever.

"If I did not always work unwearying . . .
men would follow my ways.
The worlds would perish if I did not work—
I should bring back chaos, and all beings would suffer.

"So, as the unwise work with attachment,
the wise should work without attachment,
O son of Bharata,
and seek to establish order in the world. . .

"Cast all your acts upon me,
with your mind on the Highest Soul.
Have done with craving and selfhood.
Throw off your terror, and fight! . . .

"For there is more joy in doing one's own duty badly
than in doing another man's duty well.
It is joy to die in doing one's duty,
but doing another man's duty brings dread."[83]

The teaching of the *Bhagavad Gītā* is summed up in the maxim "your business is with the deed, and not with the result". In an organized society each individual has his special part to play, and in every circumstance there are actions which are intrinsically right—from the point of view of the poet who wrote the *Gītā* they are those laid down by the Sacred Law of the Āryans and the traditions of class and clan. The right course must be chosen according to the circumstances, without any considerations of personal interest or sentiment. Thus man serves God, and in so far as he lives up to this ideal he draws near to God.

The stern ethics of the *Gītā* are clearly intended as a defence of the old established order against the attacks of reformers and unbelievers. The virtue of the brāhmaṇ is wisdom, of the warrior, valour, of the vaiśya, industry, of the śūdra, service; by fulfilling his class function to the best of his ability, with devotion to God and without personal ambition, a man will find salvation, whatever his class. It may be that the author of the *Gītā* sought merely to convey this message, rather barren and uninspiring when thus condensed. But behind his teaching was the fervour of a great religious poet, which transcended the narrow framework of contemporary social and religious law. Hence the inspiration of the *Bhagavad Gītā* has been widely felt in India from the time of the Guptas to the present day, and it has been

commended by Christians and Muslims, as well as by the Hindus, whose most influential scripture it is. No one so ungrudgingly admitted his debt to its doctrine of tireless and unselfish service as Mahātma Gāndhī, who so strongly opposed the two features of ancient Indian society which the *Gītā* itself was in part written to defend—militarism and the class system.

(v) NON-INDIAN RELIGIONS

If we are to believe a very old tradition the first Christian converts in India were made by the Disciple Thomas himself, soon after the Crucifixion. The Indian king Gondophares sent to Syria for a skilful architect to build him a new city, and the envoy returned with St. Thomas, who told the king of a City not made with hands, and converted him and many members of his court. St. Thomas afterwards preached in other parts of India, and died a martyr's death at the hands of a king called in Christian tradition Misdeos, who cannot be identified. The historicity of Gondophares, however, is unquestioned (p. 61), and the story in its main outline is not impossible, for at the time contact between India and the West was close, and an enterprising missionary could easily have travelled from Palestine to India. Roman Catholics believe that the tomb of St. Thomas is to be found in the cathedral at Mailapur, a suburb of Madras, though the evidence for the Saint's martyrdom there is not sufficient to satisfy the historian.

Several rather unreliable references to other early missions exist in church tradition, but the first certain evidence of Christian activity in India is found in the *Christian Topography* of Cosmas Indicopleustes, an adventurous Alexandrian monk of the 6th century who left an account of his travels. He states that there were churches in Kerala and Ceylon, in the hands of Persian priests, and supervised by a Persian bishop at Kalliana (perhaps the modern Kalyan). It is clear that the Indian Christians had embraced the Nestorian heresy, which was then widespread in Persia. The Nestorians were active missionaries, and their intrepid monks even crossed the wastes of Central Asia and founded successful churches in China. Whatever truth there may be in the legend of St. Thomas, it seems that these missionaries, no doubt following in the wake of Persian merchants, were chiefly responsible for establishing the Christian community in South India. When, at a later date, Islām stamped out both Zoroastrianism and Christianity in Persia, the Persian Christians turned for guidance to the patriarch of Antioch, and maintained contact with Syria to this day.

When European travellers again visited India they noticed the Christian churches of the South. Marco Polo, at the end of the 13th century, saw the tomb of St. Thomas, and remarked on its popularity as a place of pilgrimage. But the Syrian church was corrupt. There is no evidence that Indian Christians ever accepted the doctrine of transmigration, but many Hindu customs had been adopted, and the Kerala Christians, like the Buddhists and Jainas before them, were in the process of becoming a rather heterodox Hindu sect. Jesuit missionaries of the 16th and 17th centuries succeeded in preventing further decadence. One section of the Syrian church in India accepted the authority of Rome, while the other, which remained true to its traditions, reformed and purified itself.

It is in this connexion that we find the first record of an Englishman visiting India. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* states that in A.D. 884 King Alfred, to fulfil a vow, sent an envoy to India with rich gifts for the tomb of St. Thomas. Florence of Worcester, writing some 200 years later, adds that the name of the envoy was Swithelm, and that he returned safely. William of Malmesbury, on the other hand, gives his name as Bishop Sigelinus, and states that he brought back a rich present of jewels and spices from the local Indian king, who, if the story is true, must have been the Cōḷa King Āditya I or one of his chiefs. The *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* is generally reliable, and it is reasonable to believe that Alfred sent the envoy, but "India" for 9th-century Europe was a very loose term, embracing many vaguely known parts of Asia and Africa, and we cannot be sure that the envoy actually visited the tomb of St. Thomas at Mailapur, or even that it was in existence at the time. The discrepancy in the names given to the envoy by the two later chroniclers shows that the tradition was not vividly remembered, and adds to our suspicion.

On the other hand we know that Christian pilgrims undertook very difficult journeys in order to visit holy places. At the time Islām was not violently anti-Christian, and the pilgrim might have found his way across Egypt without difficulty, and thence in an Arab merchant vessel to South India. It is pleasant to picture the brave English cleric, whatever his name, telling the Cōḷa king through Arab and Tamil interpreters of King Alfred's battles with the Danes, and King Alfred, several years later, listening to the envoy's account of the wonders of India and sampling the rare spices of the Tamil land. Whatever our doubts, we cannot but hope that the story of Bishop Sigelinus is a true one.

As well as Christians small communities of Jews settled in Kerala. The earliest certain reference to this community is a 10th-century charter by which the king of the Cēras, Bhāskara Ravivarman,

gave lands and privileges to a Jew named Joseph Rabbān; but the tradition of the Jews of Kerala tells of a large settlement at Cochin in the 1st century A.D. In any case a small Jewish community has existed in India for well over a millennium. One branch has mixed freely with the local Malayālī inhabitants and its members now have typical Indian complexions and features; the other branch retains its racial purity, and is still evidently Semitic. A further ancient community of Indian Jews, the *Beni Israel*, has lived for many centuries on the west coast, and is now centred in Bombay.

Another non-Indian religious community was that of the Zoroastrians, now generally known as Pārsīs. Under Achæmenid and Sāsānian emperors Zoroastrianism was certainly practised in parts of N. W. India, and had some influence on Hinduism and Buddhism, but no very clear traces of a Zoroastrian community have survived there. Though Zoroastrian merchants may have settled on the west coast of India very early, we have no record of them until after the Arab conquest of Persia, when Persian fugitives came to India in appreciable numbers. According to the Pārsīs' own traditions one band of refugees settled first at Diū in Saurāshtra, and then at Thānā near Bombay, in the early 8th century.

Yet another community was that of the Muslims. Arabs visited India long before the days of Muhammad, and there is evidence of small Muslim communities in many of the coastal towns of the Peninsula from the 8th century onwards. The Māppilā (Moplah) community of Kerala is undoubtedly descended from settlers and converts of long before the days of Muslim invasion of India. There is, however, no clear evidence of any influence of Islām on Hinduism until after the Muslim conquest.

Thus India, though always loyal to her indigenous cults, gave a welcome to those of the West. If we except the uncertain tradition of St. Thomas' martyrdom there is no good evidence of the persecution of any of these non-Indian sects. Their members quietly pursued their own cults, small but significant elements in the religious life of the coastal cities, while the great body of Hindus were scarcely aware of the alien faiths, and in no way antagonistic to them. This capacity for toleration contributed to the characteristic resiliency of Hinduism, and helped to assure its survival.